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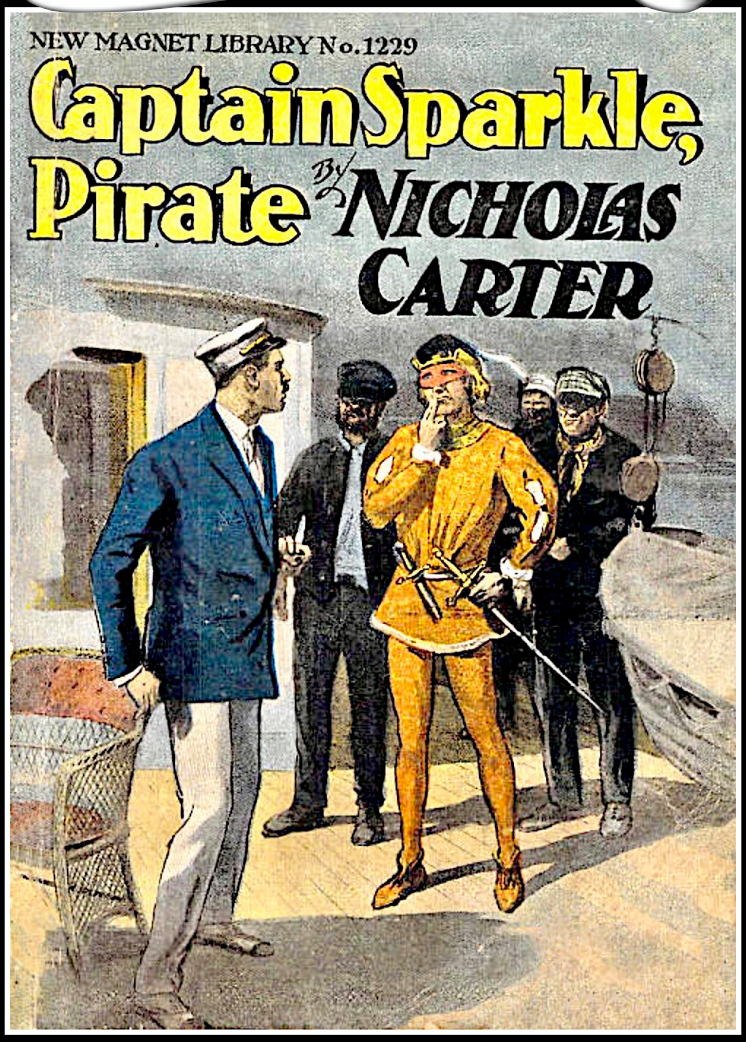

Nicholas Carter

CAPTAIN SPARKLE PIRATE

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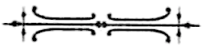

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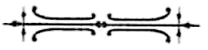
Detective - Nick Carter



CAPTAIN SPARKLE, PIRATE

NO. 1229

CAPTAIN SPARKLE, PIRATE.

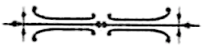
CHAPTER I.
CAPTAIN SPARKLE, THE PIRATE CHIEF.

"Mr. Maxwell Kane!"

The announcement was made by Nick Carter's valet, Joseph, who threw open the door of his master's study with a gesture as nearly approaching a flourish as any in which he ever permitted himself to indulge. Joseph had a wholesome respect for millionaires, and many a one of them came at one time and another to the detective for consultation; but it was rarely that Joseph admitted such a one as Maxwell Kane.

It was a name which was an open sesame at all doors, however exclusive; it was the name of a man who counted his millions by hundreds—of a man who, notwithstanding his great wealth, still found time to be a good fellow; of an athlete, a sportsman—in short, and in a word, a gentleman.

It was also the name of a man whom Nick Carter counted among his personal and intimate friends; but Joseph was not aware of that fact when he threw open the door and announced the caller. He had taken the card to his master a moment before, in his study, and



had been directed to "show the gentleman here, Joseph"; and Joseph knew that only persons who were privileged, indeed, were ever permitted to penetrate to Nick Carter's study.

Nick wore his house-coat, a short smoking-jacket, and had been engaged in consuming his after-breakfast cigar while he read the papers, when the caller was announced.

"Hello, Nick!" was the greeting he received from Kane. "I got up before breakfast this morning; as you will observe. What time is it, anyhow?" he added, as he dropped into a chair which the detective indicated to him, and pulled out his watch. "Not yet eight o'clock, eh? Have you had your breakfast?"

"An hour ago," replied the detective.

"Have you got anything doing to-day?"

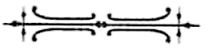
"No; I was just congratulating myself that I had not. All my assistants are out, however, so I can hardly call myself care free. I never am, you know."

"Yes, I know. Say, old chap, the *Goalong*"—he referred to his palatial steam-yacht—"is lying at the dock, over at the foot of West Twenty-third Street, waiting for us, and I want you to go aboard with me. Will you?"

"I'd like to do so, Kane," replied the detective; "but there are several things here to which I ought to give my attention to-day, now that I have a few moments at my disposal in which to do so. You see——"

"Hold on, Nick. I haven't finished yet."

"Well, go ahead, then."



"This is a business proposition I'm making. I was boarded by pirates last night, and I want you to see if you can't catch them."

"Boarded by—what?"

"Pirates—p-i-r-a-t-e-s—pirates. The real thing, too. Honest Injun, Nick! Did you ever read Cooper's 'Red Rover'? Well, I could take my oath that he has risen from the bottom of the sea and resumed business at the old stand. I hope to goodness he won't hear me; he might think I am joking, and I was never more in dead earnest in my life."

"Do you mean that the *Goalong* was boarded by pirates—really?"

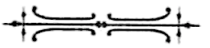
"Do I mean it! Huh! Can't you see that I've lost flesh? It takes a pretty good-sized man, with a mighty big proposition on his side of the question, to scare me, Nick, as you are aware; but that pirate chap did the act, without a hitch. I haven't got over it yet."

"You aren't trying one of your jokes on me, are you, Kane?"

"No—on my honor, no!"

"Tell me all about it."

"Not here, old man. Come aboard the yacht. I'd rather tell you there. You see, that is what I have come here for. When this thing happened, I said to my wife and her sister—they are aboard the *Goalong* with me, you know—I told them that there was only one thing for us to do, and that was to hurry to the city and find you; and so, if you don't mind—and you



have just admitted that you can spare the time—I'll take you aboard with me now, and you can hear the story there, all at once. I won't affront you by offering you anything for your services; but, all the same, if it were a question of bidding against another client in order to secure you to-day, I'd outbid Standard Oil. Can I put it any stronger than that, Nick?"

"Not very well."

"And you'll come, eh—for friendship's sake?"

"Yes; I'll be with you in a moment. Wait here."

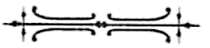
The detective left the room, but presently he returned, ready for the street, and, without more delay, the two friends left the house together.

"I came across in a car," said Kane. "You don't mind, do you?"

They boarded a west-bound Twenty-third Street car, and in a very short time were aboard the sumptuous yacht, which had been waiting to receive them.

As soon as their feet were pressed upon the deck, the plank was drawn in, and the lines cast off, and they had not advanced to the awning under which Kane's wife and two guests were seated while awaiting them, before the yacht was backing out into the river.

"I found him, as you see," said Kane, advancing rapidly. "Caught him alone, too, and with nothing to do. Think of that! Carter, have you ever met my wife's sister? Here she is. Miss Bessie Harlan. If I hadn't asked my wife to marry me before I met her sister, it would have been a toss-up between them. Now, I couldn't pay Bessie a greater compliment than thatcould



I? And this is Count Jean de Cadillac. I made the count's acquaintance in Paris last winter. We were quite chummy there, and when he showed up over here, a couple of weeks ago——"

"We became even chummier," interrupted the count, with a smile, speaking in perfect English, and smiling so that he showed his perfect, white teeth.

He was a handsome man, too, this Count Cadillac, with his shining, black eyes, blacker mustache and imperial, gleaming teeth, and clear, white skin. And his manners were faultless, his dress perfect without being foppish.

Nick greeted Mrs. Kane, and acknowledged the introductions while the yacht was backing into the river; and then, turning to Kane, while he accepted one of the deck-chairs, he remarked:

"Now, Max, give us the pirate story."

"You will understand, before I finish," said Kane, "why I insisted upon your coming here before I told it. I wanted witnesses to support my statements, for I have an idea that you wouldn't believe my unsupported word about this affair."

"Oh, yes——"

"Wait. You haven't heard the story yet. It's really the most incredible thing you ever heard of, from beginning to end. I'll give you my word that I wouldn't believe a word of it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes."

"It begins promisingly," said Nick.

"You wait. We left Newport yesterday, about noon,

I think; between noon and one o'clock. We loafed along, for nobody was in a hurry, and last night, late in the evening, we ran in at the American Yacht Club anchorage—you know where that is, eh?"

"Yes."

"We ran in there, and anchored for the night."

"We were intending to go ashore to call upon some friends who live near there," said Mrs. Kane; "but we found that it was too late when we arrived, so we gave it up."

"It was a beautiful night," continued Kane, "warm, and as nearly perfect as it could be made; and we sat out here on the deck until almost one o'clock before anybody thought of turning in. You see, Carter, it happened that we were alone at the anchorage. I don't suppose that thing would happen once again in a dozen summers, but it happened last night, all right."

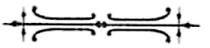
"I liked it," said Bessie Harlan. "It was a change."

"Well," continued Kane, "the Sound was as smooth as glass. There wasn't a ripple anywhere, and— —"

"And the moon was just heavenly!" interrupted Bessie, again; but Kane did not even turn his eyes in her direction.

"I came back on deck after the others turned in," he continued. "I wasn't sleepy, the night was beautiful, and I wanted to smoke another cigar, all by my little lonesome. So I sat here—right where I am seated now—lighted my cigar, and smoked.

"I am going to take you right back to that anchorage, Carter, so that you can see things just as they are, so far as the surroundings are concerned. We are headed for there now."



"That is a good idea," said Nick.

"Well, my cigar was something more than half-smoked, and, as I am a slow smoker, it must have been something like half an hour after I was alone before anything happened; and then it all happened so suddenly that it was on me before I knew it."

"What was?" asked the detective.

"The pirate. Wait."

"I'm waiting."

"The fellow made his approach from behind, which would account for my not seeing him or his craft until he was right there, on the deck, so to speak, but I don't think that would account for my not hearing him, do you?"

"You might have been dozing in your chair," suggested Nick.

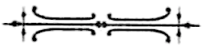
"Bosh! I was never wider awake in my life!"

"You were, doubtless, so absorbed in what you were thinking about that you paid no attention to your surroundings."

"That's all bosh, too. I was just as alert as I ever am. As I always am; and I'm not generally known as a sleeper, or a dreamer, either."

"That's quite true, Kane."

"I was just as wide-awake as I am now. I was just as much on the alert as I am now. The night was so still, and the yacht and everything aboard of her was so silent, that I could have heard a tack drop, the whole length of the *Goalong*. But the fact remains, all the same, that I did not hear a sound.



"I was seated right here, in this position and in this same chair, looking off, as you observe, almost astern. The bow of the yacht was pointed toward the open Sound, for the tide was coming in.

"My cigar was on the last quarter—I told you that once already; but never mind—and I had about made up my mind to light a fresh one, when I discovered that I hadn't another one in my pocket, and would have to go below to get it. That settled it. If I had felt any doubt about smoking another cigar, the discovery of the fact that I had not another one in my possession made me want nothing on earth so much as that cigar. So I rose to go below.

"You will observe, from my present position, that I was obliged to turn in order to do so.

"The companionway is behind me."

"I got up, stretched myself, chucked my two-thirds-smoked cigar into the water, and turned——"

He paused, as if to give emphasis to the concluding statement; and, after a moment of silence, the detective said:

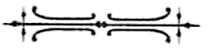
"Well, what then?"

"The pirate stood directly in front of me."

"On the deck of your own yacht—of this yacht?"

"Exactly. Right there—on that spot," and Kane pointed with his finger toward a point on the deck directly in front of him, for he had risen while he was speaking, in order to act out this dramatic incident of his story.

"Was he alone?" asked Nick.



"No; there were six others directly behind him."

"Six others!" exclaimed the detective. "Do you mean to tell me that seven men had succeeded in coming aboard your yacht, in the bright moonlight, when the Sound was as smooth as glass and the night was as still as a church, without rousing you, although you sat there on the deck smoking?"

"That is exactly what they did do."

"How did they get aboard?"

"To answer that question now is to get ahead of my story," said Kane. "I would rather tell you about it just as it happened, incident for incident."

"All right. Go ahead."

"You could have knocked me out with a crow's feather when I discovered them," continued Kane. "I hadn't a leg left to stand on, Carter. I opened my mouth to speak—I haven't the least idea what I intended to say, though—when the chief pirate raised one hand and touched his fingers to his lips."

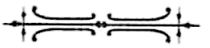
"Which you construed as a command for you to remain silent?"

"I think that gesture is so construed all over the world, isn't it?"

"Quite so. Well, what next?"

"You see, Carter, I knew by their appearance that they were robbers. It did strike me for an instant that the whole thing was some huge joke which somebody had put up on me, but I was quickly undeceived on that point."

"What was their appearance?"



"Here is where I am going to test your credulity, old man. But my wife and my friends can testify that I tell you the truth."

"So they saw the pirates, also?"

"Yes, as you shall hear."

"Well, about their appearance, or how they appeared, eh? That part of the comedy seemed to impress you."

"It did. And it was no comedy, either, I'll beg you to understand! Carter, the pirate chief was dressed in red, from head to feet, and he looked as if he might have stepped down out of a Shakespeare tragedy, as far as the cut of his costume was concerned. I think if you were to dress *Romeo* in red, you would about get the proper idea. Eh, count? What do you say?"

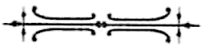
"I think you have given a very good description," replied the count.

"And the other six?" asked Nick. "Were they dressed the same?"

"No, indeed! They were only common truck alongside of their master, I suppose. At all events, they appeared in ordinary black. Every man jack of them wore a half-mask over his features. The chief's mask was red, like his costume; those of the men were black, the same as their costumes. They also wore rather tight-fitting caps on their heads, but the chief wore a regular Romeo hat, with an eagle's feather stuck in it."

"H'm!" said Nick. "It makes quite a picture."

"You'd have thought so if you had been in my place, Carter! I didn't know whether I was scared, amused, angry, or bored; and I didn't have time to analyze my sentiments, either, for when the chief touched his lips with his fingers, to signal me



that he preferred that I should keep quiet, he remarked, quite calmly and in a perfectly natural tone:

"'I don't suppose you wish needlessly to frighten the ladies, do you?'

"'Well, no,' I replied, 'I can't say that I do. They have retired, however, and we need not disturb them.'

"'On the contrary, my friend,' he said, 'it will be necessary that they are disturbed. But I am fond of the ladies. I do not like to frighten them—needlessly. Then, again, sometimes they faint away, or scream, and that offends me.'

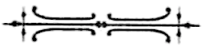
"'Indeed?' I said. 'Have I by mistake been smoking on the deck of your yacht, instead of my own?' I intended that for sarcasm, Nick, but it fell flat. He didn't see the point at all, for he replied, calmly, that I would find things much more to my taste for a few moments if I would take that view of it. 'You may consider the *Goalong* as my property for the next half-hour,' he said."

"Were they armed?" asked Nick.

"The pirate said they were, and I have no doubt that they were, although I saw no sign of weapons of any kind, save that the chief wore a short, straight sword at his side, and while he talked to me he let his hand rest upon it, as if to call my attention to the fact."

"What happened next?"

"Well, when he said that I could look upon my yacht as his property for the next half-hour or so, I didn't seem to have any fitting argument with which to reply to him, so I remained silent. His next question was rather more to the point."



"What was it?"

"He asked me, plainly, how much money I happened to have aboard the yacht; and he added: 'If you tell the truth about it, it will save both of us considerable trouble.'

"'Oh, I suppose there are a couple of thousand dollars here, all told,' I answered him.

"'Very good,' he said. 'There is also some thousands of dollars' worth of silverware, and goldware, isn't there?'

"'Yes,' I admitted.

"'And some very valuable cups, which you have won as trophies, from time to time, eh?'

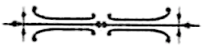
"'Why, yes, of course. But you wouldn't be so low down as to take them, would you?' I demanded.

"He laughed at that, as if he considered it a good joke; and he replied that he thought that part of the matter might be arranged satisfactorily. I didn't see it, but I supposed he did, and the sequel proved that he did, too."

"I am waiting for the sequel. What happened next?"

"He said to me: 'Mr. Kane, you will oblige me by considering that, for the moment, I am master of this yacht, and you will, therefore, obey such orders as I give you. You need not look forward in the hope that any of your crew is astir, for they are all asleep below, save one, who was on watch, and he is now lying, bound and gagged, in the bow.'

"'All right,' I said. 'What are your orders, Mr. Rover? You seem to have the drop on me, and I'll take my medicine with a smile. Speak up. Don't be bashful.'



"'I have already informed you,' he replied, without taking any notice of my facetiousness, 'that it would be a pity to frighten the ladies. It is, however, necessary that they should be called to the deck, as I care as little to affront them as I do to frighten them.'

"'Why not leave them where they are, then?' I asked.

"'Because it is necessary to make a somewhat thorough search of their sleeping quarters. I have come here to obtain their valuables, as well as your own,' he continued, 'and it would be decidedly ungentlemanly for me to do so without first having them called away.'"

"That was real considerate of him, don't you think so, Mr. Carter?" asked Mrs. Kane.

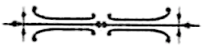
"Why, yes. But how did he carry out the idea?"

"He merely ordered me to go below and call them. He directed me to tell them that a party of gentlemen had called unexpectedly, and that I insisted upon their coming on deck at once, in order that they might meet with a great surprise, and that they were to promise me that they would not be frightened, no matter what they saw.

"'That,' he assured me, 'will arouse their curiosity, so that they will not consider it a bore to dress themselves again, and do as you ask.' You see, he knows something about women, that chap."

"Did he go below again?" asked the detective.

"Nay, nay—not on your life! The pirate stuck close beside me all the while, and he held that naked, flat sword in his hand, too. I didn't like the looks of it a little bit."



"So you called your wife and her sister, eh?"

"Yes; and the count."

"Didn't they protest?"

"Protest! I should say so! My wife flatly refused to come, at first; and she wouldn't have come, either, if I hadn't told her that the whole blooming push would come down there and pull her out, willy-nilly, if she didn't obey. Bessie didn't raise a kick. She thought there was some fun on hand, and she is always ripe for that sort of thing. The count swore like a— —"

"Now it is my turn to protest, Kane," said the count.

"Well, I heard you, and it did me good, for I wanted to do a little swearing myself. I have never felt quite so small in my life as I did just then.

"Well, Nick, after I did the calling, we returned to the deck. The pirate's followers had not moved from their position in line, and they didn't until the chief waved his hand, and then they fell apart into groups, for all the world as if they were a lot of guests whom I had invited to the yacht. But he didn't join them—not he. Instead, he dropped into that chair where the count is seated, and said coolly:

"'Mr. Kane, I am Captain Sparkle. When your guests come on deck, I will thank you to present me to them.'"

CHAPTER II.
THE MYSTERY OF THE PIRATE CRAFT.

"Let me talk, now!" exclaimed Bessie. "I was the first one to reach the deck after you called us, Max."

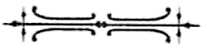
"All right. I've no objections. I feel like seven different kinds of a jay, anyhow, when I tell this story; and, by the great boot in Chatham Street, Nick, I'd willingly give up a million rather than go through with it again! All the same, I want those race cups back again, if I can get them."

"So the pirate took them, did he? I thought he said it might be arranged so that you could keep them?"

"Oh, he took them, all right; and he did offer to make an arrangement; but I will tell you all about that when Bessie gets through."

Nick turned so that he faced Miss Harlan.

"I was the first one to reach the deck," she began, "and I saw a distinguished-looking man seated in that chair where the count is sitting. He wore a red mask over his face, as Max has described it, and his costume was strikingly like a Romeo get-up, only it was red. My first thought was that some of Max's friends had discovered that we were at the anchorage, and had come aboard to treat us to an impromptu fancy-dress party. I



really supposed that I would have known them, had they not been masked, and regarded the whole thing as a joke, so I went toward them, humming 'Gaily the Troubadour.' But when I drew nearer, so that I could get a view of Max's face, I was startled; he looked so savage, and he was chewing away at his mustache, just as if he had not spent hours and hours in training it ever since it sprouted."

"That will do, Bessie. Just keep to your story, if you don't mind," said Kane.

"Well," she continued, "I saw then that something was the matter. My first thought was that Max was annoyed because his friends had come; but when he rose in his place, and, in an icy tone, said: 'Miss Harlan, I am compelled, much against my will, to introduce a gentleman thief to you,' I didn't know what to say, or think. But before I could do either, the pirate had turned toward Max, and I could see the flash of his eyes through the holes in his mask, while he said icily:

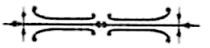
"'Mr. Kane, if I hear a repetition of your present offense, the consequences to yourself and your ladies will be upon your own head! I beg that you will present me properly, sir!'

"I was nonplused, Mr. Carter, and I could see that Max was swearing mad. However, he did as he was told.

"'This is Captain Sparkle, a pirate,' he said. And then he called out to my sister, who was just appearing, to go back and get his box of cigars for him.

"I turned to the pirate then, and said: 'You have selected a late hour to make your call upon us, Captain Sparkle.'

"'From necessity, believe me, madam,' he replied, bowing.



"My sister and the count appeared at that moment, and Max introduced them by saying, between his teeth:

"'My wife, and Count Cadillac—Captain Sparkle.' Cora had brought the cigars with her, and Max lighted one of them. After that he seemed better."

"And had you not guessed the true significance of the presence of the man in red?" asked Nick.

"No; I saw that something was wrong, but what it was or what it all meant, I had no idea. The pirate, however, did not leave me long in doubt."

"No? What did he say, and do?"

"Let me speak, now," interjected Kane's wife.

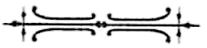
"By Jove!" muttered Kane. "One would think this was a prize composition tourney!"

"My first impression about the matter," said Mrs. Kane, "was much the same as Bessie's. And I suppose the count's was the same."

"Yes," replied the count. "Quite so."

"However," she continued, "as Bessie says, we were not long left in doubt. Captain Sparkle, as he called himself, snapped his fingers, and his men, whom I had noticed when I came out of the cabin, came forward—or, rather, aft—at once, falling into line like trained soldiers.

"'Ladies and gentlemen,' said Captain Sparkle, then, 'these are my followers. We have come here on an important errand. We are, in a word, collecting jewels, trinkets, money, and valuables of all kinds. In your own world you would designate



us as robbers, or, perhaps, by the term which Mr. Kane has just now applied to me—pirates. I am about to send several of my men below to obtain what you have there, and you will each spare yourself unnecessary annoyance resulting from broken locks and rumpled wearing apparel, if you will produce your keys, and give me such directions as will aid us in our search.'

"It was quite a speech, Mr. Carter, and I think I have repeated it word for word. I was amazed. I did not know what to think. I was frightened, too; and then, for the first time, I saw that my husband was almost beside himself with rage and chagrin. I knew then that the strangely attired man had spoken the truth, and that they were robbers.

"I thought Bessie would faint.

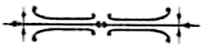
"She uttered a cry, and came closer to me; and that act of hers led the pirate to make another speech.

"'I beg, ladies,' he said, 'that you will not be needlessly alarmed. You are in no personal danger. You will not be molested in any way. You have only to remain seated here in the chairs until we have finished our business, when we will depart, as we came, in silence. And in the meantime I will direct one of my men to act as steward, and to bring wine to you. Now, if you please, the keys and the information I requested.'"

"Now wait, Cora," said Kane. "It is my turn again."

"Go on," said Nick.

"The pirate left three of his men on deck to watch us while he took the others below with him. Of course, that was after we had given up our keys, and all the information he asked for about our valuables.



"The men he left to guard us were armed, too, this time. They each held a revolver. I don't know where they got them, for I had not seen them before. Not one of them uttered a word, however. They simply stood there, with their pistols in their hands, like so many wax figures. The count spoke to them two or three times, but he got no reply at all.

"After a few minutes, one of the men who had gone below with the chief came back with a tray. The scoundrel had opened the steward's pantry and helped himself; but he sent up a bottle of sherry, a bottle of whisky, and a siphon of seltzer."

"But he did not come himself, eh?" asked Nick.

"Not until he was through below. Then he appeared. But in the meantime his men had come up, two by two, carrying stuff they had stolen; but they covered everything with blankets or table linen, so I could not see a thing they were taking away.

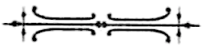
"Once, when two of them were carrying a particularly heavy bundle toward the bow of the yacht, I half-rose from my chair, to observe them more closely; but it was only to find that one of the rascals on guard over me had thrust the muzzle of his revolver under my nose, so I resumed my seat without a word.

"Well, after awhile, Carter, the pirate got all he could find, and he came on deck himself. He came at once to where I was sitting, and said:

"'Now, Mr. Kane, about that money, if you please.

Where is it? I have discovered considerably less than the sum you were good enough to mention.'

"'You haven't discovered any that I mentioned,' I replied to him.



"'So I supposed. I will ask you to produce what you have about you.'

"But he did not take my watch, my cuff-buttons, or my stickpin, and, although he relieved the count of his money, he left him his watch and other things.

"And there was an odd thing about it all, too, Carter. He did not touch with his own hands a thing we offered him. One of his men stepped forward in each instance, to accept our offerings.

"But, after it was all over, after he had returned the keys, and thanked each one of us for the use of them, the strangest thing of the whole proceeding took place.

"You asked me, when we began, how the fellow got aboard, and I told you that, to reply to that question, would be to get ahead of my story."

"Yes," said the detective.

"Well, until that moment, I myself had no idea how he had accomplished it. I am not positive, even, that I had asked myself the question. So many things had happened in such a short time, and my mind had been kept so employed in thinking about the absurdity of the whole occurrence, that the mere incident of how the pirate came aboard my yacht, or how he intended to take his departure, when the moment arrived to do so, did not present itself."

"I can readily understand that."

"But I was soon to discover.

"He returned the keys, and thanked us for our courtesy with the air of a Chesterfield. Then, with a bow, which would have

made Beau Brummel stare with envy, he turned his back and walked to the bow of the yacht.

"Mind you, there had not been a sound during the entire proceeding which would have called a single member of my crew to the deck, even had they all been awake and listening, and to this moment, with the exception of the one man who was captured by the pirates and bound and gagged near the forecastle-hatch, not a man of my crew is aware of what happened."

"Do you mean that you have managed to keep it a secret from all of them?"

"Yes, I do mean that. It is bad enough to have the members of my own family know about it—it is bad enough to be compelled to tell you about it—without living to the end of my days knowing that my men are quietly laughing in their sleeves at me."

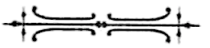
"I am afraid that you are oversensitive about it, Kane."

"Humph! Perhaps so; but I don't like to be laughed at. And, more, I am not one who is supposed to submit to such a proceeding without offering the slightest resistance."

"I know that."

"And here I permitted that fellow to come aboard, to take me by surprise, to compel me to call my wife and my guests to the deck, to give up my keys and my money to him, and to do a hundred different things to assist him in his robbery, and all that without one word of protest, and without offering the slightest resistance; but I said that before."

"He had the drop on you, Kane."



"Had the drop on me? I should say he did! He had the drop on me, and he had the sand all out of me, as well! That is what makes me so mad whenever I think about it."

"Well, about his manner of coming aboard and leaving the yacht. You started to tell me about that?"

"When the pirate left us to walk forward, I noticed for the first time that there was a craft of some kind lying across our bow. I could see the two slender, tapering masts, but from where I was seated, here in this chair, I could see nothing of the hull."

"The *Goalong* stands rather high out of the water. She has unusual freeboard for a craft of her size. That fact might account for what you tell me."

"Sure! I understand that now. It did account for it—or, rather, it does account for it, as you shall see."

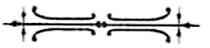
"Well, go on."

"Captain Sparkle was the last one of his crew to leave the deck of the yacht. He stood yonder in the bow until they had all disappeared. Then he turned, and, after waving his hand at us, he also jumped from the deck of the yacht and disappeared."

"And then?" asked Nick.

"Why, then I could control myself no longer. I leaped to my feet and started forward. I don't know just what I intended to do, save that my first thought was to dive below, get a gun of some sort, and take a shot at something. But the count stopped that."

"The count? How was that?"



"When I leaped from my chair, he grabbed me. I suppose I have to thank him for it, and the ladies, also, for the pirate might have returned if I had shot at him."

"Well?"

"Then we stood right here, where we are now; the entire group; and we watched that pirate sail away without offering a word or an act of protest. Nick, did you ever see what is called a turtle-back craft on the great lakes?"

"Often."

"Well, if you should reduce the size of one of them to about seventy-five or eighty feet, over all, and then run a bright nickel rail all the way around her from end to end, it would give you a better idea of that pirate craft than anything I can think of. And yet it is not a very correct idea, either. You will have to eliminate the upper works of the turtle-back, and also the funnel. Just bear in mind, will you, that the thing was not in sight for more than two minutes, at the most, so I had not much chance to take her measure."

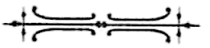
"Where did she go?"

"Go! She went like a shot out of a gun! She went like a bullet. And she was just about the color of the water, so it was next to impossible to see her after she was several hundred feet away, even in that bright moonlight."

"I can understand that."

"I wish you could have seen her."

"So do I. But suppose you describe her to us, without reference to turtle-backs. Describe her just as you would if you had never seen a turtle-back."



"All right. She was, I should say, seventy-five or eighty feet, over all, and from sixteen to twenty feet beam. I am guessing at it, of course."

"Certainly."

"She was long and narrow, and floated as if she was rather deep in the water. She carried two masts, but I saw no sign of a sail upon her. There was no funnel, and when she shot away from the bow of the yacht, her motive power, whatever it was, made no noise whatever, so I presume she was propelled by electricity."

"Storage-battery power, eh?"

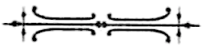
"Yes. Her deck was convex from end to end, and guarded, as I have already said, by a nickel rail which ran her entire length. Away forward there was a low turret, shaped like an old-fashioned poke bonnet, if the wearer of the bonnet were looking aft. This was, no doubt, the wheel-house. Amidships there was a second turret, shaped like an iron kettle, and about six or eight feet in diameter. Aft there was another one, exactly like it; and that is all."

"Do you think she might have been a submarine?"

"No, I do not. I have thought of that, and studied over it. She did not seem to me to be the proper model for a submarine; at least, she was not at all the shape of the generally accepted pattern for that sort of a craft."

"Well, what did she suggest to you?"

"Something more in the line of a small torpedo-boat destroyer—long, narrow, low in the water, swift, almost invisible by reason of her color, and with her upper housings so



arranged that if she should be awash in a heavy sea she would be none the worse for it, because, with her turrets closed and locked, not a drop of water could get inside the hull."

"Where did she go?"

"Straight out into the Sound. I have told you that the tide had swung us so our bow was pointing that way. The pirate crept in upon us while I was sitting there aft, smoking and dreaming. He probably came in under very little power, so that he was actually alongside before I could hear a sound. I even doubt if I would have seen her if I had happened to look in that direction. And now, Nick, you have got the whole story. What do you think about it?"

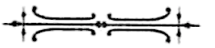
"I haven't heard the count's version of the affair yet," said the detective, smiling.

"Mine?" replied the count, stroking his imperial, and showing his splendid teeth. "I am afraid, Mr. Carter, that I can add very little to what has already been said. At the present moment I can recall only one detail which seems to have escaped the others."

"And what is that, if you please?" asked the detective.

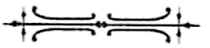
"I noticed merely that the pirate's hair was very light in color—about what you would select for your idea of a Norwegian viking; but I also noticed that his eyes were very dark—black, I should say, although the holes in his mask did not give much of an opportunity to view them. But, if I am correct, the combination would suggest, would it not, that the hair was a wig, and that his own natural crown was black?"

"Quite so," said Nick.



"And now tell us what you think about it," insisted Maxwell Kane.

"I think as you do," replied the detective, smiling; "that you were visited by a pirate, who has succeeded in injuring your feelings much more than he did your purse. But now I want you to answer some questions which occur to me; and after that—well, after that we'll see what can be done."



CHAPTER III.
"THAT FELLOW WHO LOOKS LIKE ME."

Do you think you can catch him?" asked Bessie Harlan, leaning forward in her chair, with rapt interest depicted in her expression.

Nick Carter laughed aloud.

"It would seem, Miss Harlan," he replied, "that at the present moment, in order to do that, I would be obliged to swim. Pirates do not leave clues behind them, like burglars, outlaws, footpads, and common thieves. You cannot pick up old buttons and locks of hair on the crest of the waves, and there are no saloons and other places of resort along the coast which I might frequent in order to get on the track of one of the pirate's pals. However— —"

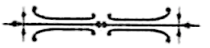
"I see you are laughing at me," she said.

"Not at all, I assure you. But you asked me if I thought I could catch him, so I have to reply that I don't know."

"Oh, he'll catch him, all right!" said Kane, with supreme confidence.

"Do you really think so?" asked the count.

"If he does not," insisted Kane, "this pirate chap will be the first fellow Nick was ever up against whom he did not catch in the end. But what are those questions, Nick?"



"Why, I'll begin with this one. You quoted one remark made by the pirate which suggested that it might have been followed by another on the same subject later on. But, first, let me ask you if he did take your race cups—your trophies?"

"Yes—confound him! He did take them—every one of them!"

"That brings me back to the question. When reference was first made to them, you asked him to spare you those, and he replied that he thought that subject could be arranged. Now, his reply to you would suggest that he intended to permit you to retain them, provided you made up their value to him in some other form. Was there anything of that sort mentioned?"

Kane leaned back in his chair, and lighted a fresh cigar.

"You are a cute proposition, Nick," he said. "I was saving that as a sort of surprise for you, but I see you are beyond surprising."

"Then he did refer to the subject again?"

"No; he did not refer to it again in words, but he left a note behind him about it."

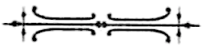
"Ah, that is better still! I begin to think that a pirate can leave clues behind him, after all."

"Oh, it was not much," said Kane.

"Such as it was, however, let me see it."

Kane produced his pocketbook, and from one of the compartments took a slip of paper, which he gave into the hand of the detective.

"There it is," he said. "Read it for yourself."



The detective spread the note open before him, and read aloud:

"I have taken your trophies, Mr. Kane, as you will observe, but I will give you my promise that you shall hear from me concerning them, and be given an opportunity to redeem them, if you care to do so, before they are destroyed; and for that you have the word of Captain Sparkle, of the *Shadow*."

"That must be the name of his craft, the *Shadow*," said Kane.

"Without doubt."

"What do you get from the note? Anything?"

"I get a specimen of Sparkle's handwriting, which, it is true, amounts to little or nothing; but we also get that promise, which I have no doubt he will keep, that he will communicate with you again, and in that communication will make some sort of a suggestion by which you may redeem your cups."

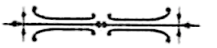
"And do you think you might be able to get on the track in that way?"

"I think that such a thing is possible, although extremely improbable. We will have to wait until we receive the communication before we bank too much on what it may contain."

"Exactly. That is what I thought."

"Tell me, did the pirate talk to you as if he were making any effort to disguise his voice?"

"Not at all."



"Did anything about his voice, his manner, his walk, his air, or his conduct remind you of any living person you know, or of anybody you have ever seen before?"

Kane broke out into immoderate laughter, and, turning toward the count, he exclaimed:

"What did I tell you, Cadillac?" and then to Nick he added: "Count Cadillac ought to thank his stars that he was here aboard the yacht when the pirate visited us, for, honestly, Carter, there was not a thing about him which did not in some way suggest the count himself to me."

"Indeed!" said Nick. "That is rather remarkable, don't you think so?"

"Highly so. I should say," said the count.

Kane laughed on; but presently he said:

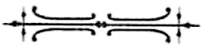
"His voice, his manner of speaking, his walk, his carriage, his general air, his height, his figure—even his courtly bow—was Count Cadillac all over. We have had a good laugh about it among ourselves, Carter. Even the count admits it to be true, and, like a good fellow, he has consented not to take offense if I forget myself and joke him about it."

"That is very kind of you, count," said the detective. "It can't be very pleasant to be told that you resemble a pirate."

"Oh, I don't at all mind it, Mr. Carter."

"And do you yourself recognize the logic of the suggestion?"

"I am forced to admit that I do."



"Did the pirate, at the time he was here, remind you of yourself?"

"Oh, well, that is perhaps going too far, don't you know. I must confess that I did not discover it at the time; but afterward, when the subject was brought to my attention——"

"You did see it, then, eh?"

"Yes, I really did, sir."

"And were the ladies impressed by the same idea?" asked Nick, turning toward them. "I mean, of course, before it was suggested by Mr. Kane?"

"Oh, yes," replied Mrs. Kane. "We both saw it, and spoke about it together before Max referred to it at all."

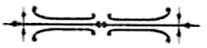
"Did it strike you, also, Miss Harlan, before your sister spoke about it?"

"Yes, indeed. I saw it at once. That was why I took things so easy when I first came on deck. When I saw Captain Sparkle standing there beside Max, I thought he was the count. I suspected at that moment that the whole thing was an entertainment of some sort that he had gotten up for our benefit."

"And you, Mrs. Kane?"

"You must remember that I came on deck with the count, so I could not possibly mistake the pirate for him; but it did occur to me, when I heard the man's voice, that he might be a brother, or——"

"Who had taken that opportunity and that occasion to present himself to you, eh?"



"Why, yes; something like that. But the thought did not have time to take form before the idea was entirely driven out of my head."

"Of course not"

"You seem to take this thing quite seriously, Carter," said Kane.

"Certainly, Max. Don't you understand that, while the suggestion is not at all complimentary to the count, it still gives me rather a correct idea concerning Sparkle's appearance, with the red costume eliminated; and I don't suppose he wears that costume in private life."

"I see. You mean that if you should meet somebody in the corridor of the Waldorf, for example, who reminded you of the count, you would immediately jump at the conclusion that he was the pirate chief, Sparkle, eh?"

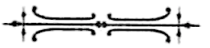
"I don't make it so emphatic as that, Max. What do you think of it, count?" asked Nick.

"Oh, wouldn't I like to catch him, whoever he may be! Oh, wouldn't I give him particular fits—that fellow who looks like me!" sang the count, in reply. And then he broke into a laugh.

"This is all really so ridiculous, don't you know," he said; "so absurd! And yet, Mr. Carter, there is enough truth about it to give it some interest, after all."

"Now, Max, how much property did the fellow get away with?"

"As near as I can figure it, about twenty thousand dollars' worth. That includes the cash he took, which amounts to almost three thousand. Why, Nick, he didn't leave us a solid silver



piece of any description on the yacht. You will see that for yourself when we go down to luncheon."

The *Goalong* was passing through Hell Gate at the moment, and Nick, who had been thinking deeply since Kane's last remark, turned to him suddenly.

"I believe you said we were bound for the anchorage, where the pirate visited you, eh?" he asked.

"Yes."

"What was your idea in doing that?"

"Well, I thought you might like to see the ground—that is, the ripples—where the thing occurred."

"Yes, I would," said Nick seriously. And then he added: "Do you happen to have bathing-suits aboard, Max?"

"Sure! Why? Want to take a swim?"

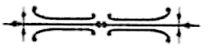
"Oh, I thought of it. I always feel that way when I get out on the water! and it is a very warm day, don't you think?"

"I'll bet it is hot enough to boil eggs along Broadway by this time."

"How deep is the water at the anchorage, Max—I mean at the buoy where you tied up last night?"

"I haven't an idea. Thirty feet, perhaps."

"We'll be there presently, and after we have anchored, if the ladies will indulge me in the desire, I will borrow one of those bathing-suits and take a dip. Who will join me?" he added, taking them all in in his question.



But Kane alone replied in the affirmative. The count shrugged his shoulders, and remarked that he would much prefer his book and a cigar under the awning, and the ladies said they would seize that opportunity to be put ashore, in order that they might make the calls in the neighborhood which they had been unable to do the preceding evening.

Thirty minutes later the *Goalong* was made fast to the buoy where she was floating at the time of Captain Sparkle's unannounced visit.

CHAPTER IV.
NICK'S DEDUCTIONS.

The detective was not sorry when, a little later, he found that the ladies had prevailed upon the count to accompany them on their trip ashore; and that, therefore, he would be left alone on the yacht with Maxwell Kane. And, as soon as the yacht was deserted, save for themselves and the crew, the two friends lost no time in getting into the bathing-suits.

Before either of them dived into the depths of the water, however, Nick dropped into one of the chairs under the awning and motioned to Kane to take the seat beside him.

"We have plenty of time," he said, "and I would like to get a few more whiffs out of this cigar before I throw it away. Tell me, Max, how do you account for that resemblance?"

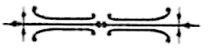
"What resemblance?"

"Between the pirate and the count."

"Why, I have not thought to try to account for it. I suppose it is one of those extraordinary coincidences which are always inexplicable."

"Did you ever happen to run across a coincidence which was entirely inexplicable, Max?" asked Nick.

"Why, yes, I think so."



"Well, I have not."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"I meant that the things we denominate by the rather vague term 'coincidence' inevitably have a direct relation between them, if you take the trouble to trace each one to its original source."

"Which means—what?"

"Which means that, according to my theory, there should be something more than now appears on the surface to explain this unaccountable resemblance between the pirate and the count."

"Surely, Nick, you don't mean to accuse the count of——"

"I don't mean to accuse anybody of anything. I am merely endeavoring to explain a circumstance which strikes me as being remarkable, to say the least."

"But, Nick——"

"Wait, please. If you had been the only one to notice the resemblance, I should have paid no attention whatever to it."

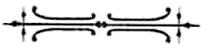
"Thanks, awfully!"

"I don't mean my remark that way, Max. I do mean that your unsupported theory in that respect would not have been of sufficient importance to have attracted my attention. I should, in that case, have regarded it merely as a phantom of your own brain."

"I see what you are getting at."

"No, you don't—yet. Not quite."

"Well, go ahead, then, and explain."



"Let us look at the thing calmly, candidly, and logically."

"Certainly."

"You have known—and so have I—circumstances where you have thought a child to exactly resemble its father, while another person would be equally strong in the belief that it hadn't a trace of its father about it, but, on the contrary, was a picture of its mother."

"Hundreds of them."

"Again, we might go out some evening, and, while we were together, meet with a person of whom I would say, 'Max, that young woman reminds me of your wife's sister,' and I would be surprised when you replied that they were no more alike than chalk and cheese. You know of instances of that kind, eh?"

"Loads of them."

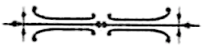
"And I don't suppose it ever occurred to you to make any effort to explain this seemingly remarkable diversity of opinion upon a very simple and apparently plain subject, eh?"

"No, save that I have always let it go with the private opinion that the other fellow was not half as observant as I."

"Exactly. But if you had chosen to investigate, you would have discovered a well-defined reason for the difference of opinion."

"Humph! Well, I never thought about it. What is it?"

"This: No human being appears exactly the same to one acquaintance or friend as he does to another. To make it more plain, there are no two persons in the world to whom your personality, and therefore your appearance, is the same. The



count does not look at you through the same glasses that I use. The captain of your yacht does not know you as your engineer knows you, and vice versa. You have as many personalities as you have associates, acquaintances, friends—what you will."

"I will grant you that; but what has all this to do with the particular case we are discussing?"

"Much, if you will wait till I finish."

"All right, old man; go ahead."

"Associated with every person alive there are points of resemblance which might be denominated common property. Another person who has been introduced to the count, as I have been this morning, would recognize him as I would, also, if they happened to encounter each other on the street; but, if you should dress the count up in a costume similar to the one the pirate wore, there is not one out of ten who would even be reminded of the count at such an encounter, unless he made some gesture—not one, but several, mind you—which would bring him to mind. I don't know if I make myself plain."

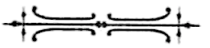
"Oh, yes, you do—entirely so!"

"Now, if, on the other hand, it was expected that the count would appear in some such outlandish costume, the whole ten would recognize him at once—see?"

"Yes."

"Oliver Wendell Holmes tells us that when John and Thomas encounter each other on the highway, there are six persons talking."

"How is that? You are getting beyond me now."



"There is John as he thinks he is, John as Thomas thinks he is, and John as God knows he is; and there is Thomas as he thinks he is, Thomas as John thinks he is, and Thomas as God knows he is. So, you see, there are six, quite plainly."

"Well, Nick?"

"When that pirate chief came aboard this yacht, while he was standing here on the deck with you, his personality was like his face, masked."

"Exactly."

"When your wife's sister came on the deck, she sought at once—as any other person would have done—to pierce that mask."

"Yes."

"Her impressions were not coerced in any direction by misgivings. She had not been frightened; she did not know that there was occasion for fear of any kind; her first idea of the affair was that it was some sort of a hoax."

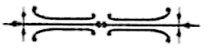
"Yes."

"And in her first effort to pierce that mask which the pirate wore over his personality, if I may use the expression to convey an idea, she saw what you had already seen—a suggestion of the count."

"That is as sure as you are born!"

"As she advanced toward you, that first impression grew upon her, and it was not until he had made some pronounced gesture, muscular or vocal, that she changed her opinion."

"Right."



"Now, let us go a little further. When your wife came on deck, her mind was in the same condition as Miss Harlan's; that is, she also saw no occasion for fright. But, again, the count was with her, and, therefore, she could not mistake the pirate for him. But, notwithstanding all that, she saw the likeness, or felt it, and it was so evident to her that it was impressed as strongly upon her as upon her sister."

"Well, gee whiz, Nick, the pirate wasn't the count!"

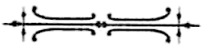
"I know that. But the pirate, whose whole personality was cloaked in a disguise, and who wore a mask upon his face as well as upon his person, still possessed those attributes which every person finds it almost impossible to conceal; certain characteristics which are born with us, which we inherit, or which we assume from constant habit, and which may be found among members of the same family, almost without exception.

"Now, wait, Max. I, personally, have made it my study to know what those attributes and characteristics are, so far as I am directly concerned, in order that, in the pursuit of my profession, I may throw them aside, as far as possible, when I have occasion to assume a disguise; and I have studied them in others, in order that I may be able to recognize another person by them, when that other person has assumed a disguise."

"I see."

"But the average man has not done so. For example, you could not so disguise yourself that I would not recognize you on the instant; but I could so change my appearance that you would not guess my personality in a thousand years."

"I believe that—in fact, I know it."



"What I could perform in that particular, the average man would find impossible of accomplishment. You are an average man under the rule I am laying down, and so is the pirate chief."

"Precisely. I follow you."

"On the occasion of his visit to this yacht, his mask and his disguise sufficiently concealed his identity so that he had no fear, or even thought, of being recognized when he was seen again by any of you, if he ever should be."

"Yes."

"And, again, it is a presumption that he has never met any of you, and, therefore, there was, in his opinion, no occasion to conceal those attributes and characteristics to which I have already referred."

"I am beginning to catch on to your idea."

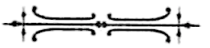
"Therefore, he brought his attributes and his characteristics with him. He did not think it necessary to put them aside with his citizens' clothing. He wore them, just as he wore his arms, his legs, and his head—because they were a necessary part of him."

"Precisely. I see the point."

"Now, you, Miss Harlan and your wife had no means of identifying the man himself; you could only identify his characteristics."

"I like attributes better; the word comprehends more."

"All right. Let it go at that. You could only identify



his attributes; that is to say, his gestures, mannerisms, the keynote of his voice, rather than the voice itself; his carriage; his step in walking, rather than the walk itself——"

"You refer to the method of putting his foot to the deck—that is what I noticed."

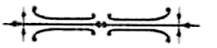
"Yes; his method of putting his foot down. That is inevitably a family characteristic, and may be almost invariably recognized, whether a man is bow-legged, halt, or crippled in any way. You could only recognize the outward visible signs. Your wife and her sister were in the same category. There was no suggestion made to any one of you, or between any two of you. In each case it was an individual opinion, based upon some recognized quality."

"By Jove, Nick!"

"With you, that recognized quality consisted in his manner of putting his feet to the deck when he walked; in the cases of your wife and her sister, the quality was doubtless a different one in each case, so we may conclude that there were at least three separate and distinct characteristics which led three people to the same conclusion; and bear in mind that not one of you three people is a close observer. Bear in mind, also, that not one of the three were expecting what was discovered, but that the thing you did discover was an unmistakable suggestion of the personality of your guest, the Count of Cadillac."

"Great Jehoshaphat, Nick! What in the world do you mean to try to deduce from all that? Eh?"

"What do you think about it yourself?"



"I'm blessed if I know what to think! You've got me all tangled up, if anybody should ask you. Tell me what you think?"

"Well, Max, my profession is a strange one. I go my ways by signs. Family characteristics and personal attributes, as applied to identification, is one of my hobbies. I don't intend, at the present moment, to cast any unkind insinuation upon your guest; but, all the same, while I am looking for this pirate, I shall also look up the family traits, characteristics, and personal attributes of Jean, Compte de Cadillac."

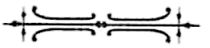
CHAPTER V.
THE MARK OF THE ROVER'S KEEL.

Kane remained like a statue in his chair, staring at the detective. The suggestions thrown out by Nick Carter concerning Count Cadillac paralyzed him, so to speak. He was appalled by it, and—he could not bring himself to the belief that there was anything in it more than that strange circumstance which he had described in the beginning as circumstance. And yet, all the while, he was forced to admit to himself that there were suspicious circumstances.

Suddenly, without a word of his intention, but being already garbed in his bathing-suit, he kicked off the sandals he wore, leaped to his feet, reached the side of the yacht with one bound, and dived into the water.

Just as he poised on the rail, he shouted to the detective to "come on," and so he had scarcely disappeared in the water before Nick was after him. But when Nick Carter dived he did not come immediately to the surface, as did Maxwell Kane. The moment he was underneath the surface he turned toward the bow of the yacht, and, continuing under the water, he passed under the vessel's bow to the port side before coming to the top again for air.

After a moment he heard Kane calling, and, not wishing to frighten his host, he answered.



"Come along forward, Max," he called. "I have a suggestion to make."

"Well, what is it?" asked Kane, when he appeared.

"As nearly as I can determine from the description you have given me, the yacht is lying in relatively the same position she occupied when the pirate came aboard of her, is she not? Isn't she headed about the same?"

"I should say that she could not be put more exactly in the same spot," replied Max.

"In that case," said Nick, pointing with his finger, "the pirate craft should have been lying about yonder—so, while Captain Sparkle was giving you his original impersonation of *Hamlet*."

"Yes; her bow must have been about yonder, and her stern out there"—indicating with gestures the positions he described.

"And when Sparkle and his men went over the side from the yacht to their own craft, where is the point where they did that?"

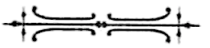
"Right here—directly over our heads."

"When the pirate craft left you, she must have gone in that direction," continued the detective, pointing toward the Sound.

"Yes, that is about it."

"All right. Thank you."

Nick had been clinging to the bowsprit-stay while he was talking; but now, without more remarks, he released his hold upon it and permitted himself to sink slowly into the depths.



Kane happened to be looking away from him at that moment, and he continued, through several sentences, his description of how the pirate had sailed out of the harbor into the open Sound, where she had finally disappeared. Perceiving, presently, that his description was not received with the enthusiasm he had a right to expect, he turned his head, and for the first time discovered that the detective was no longer there.

Kane was a strong swimmer, but was not overfond of diving, and so, instead of pursuing the detective, who he expected had merely gone under the vessel in order to reach the other side, he swam away lustily toward the stern, and climbed upon the deck again, where he seated himself under the shade of the awning.

But Nick Carter had not permitted himself to sink beneath the water merely for the purpose of disappearing in order to reappear again at another spot. In fact, his request for the bathing-suit, and for the opportunity to use it, had been with a well-defined motive other than the mere pleasure to be derived from a dip in the sea.

The detective really wished to examine the bottom of the cove. The idea did not occur to him because he believed that he would discover any suggestive trace of the pirate down there, but he put the thought into words because it was his professional habit never to neglect even the most trivial and apparently unimportant item from his investigations.

The idea of examining the bottom of the Sound for traces of a vessel which had passed over that spot would be absurdly ludicrous; but, all the same, there was one idea which had been suggested to Nick by the description Kane had given him of the pirate craft, and he believed it to be more than possible that

there might be an indication of the fact—if it were a fact—to be found at the bottom, not far from the buoy to which the yacht was moored.

It will be remembered that he asked Kane if he thought the pirate craft was a submarine, and it must be recorded that, notwithstanding the reply he received, he thought it more than probable that the silent approach of the vessel had been accomplished in that way.

Nick knew that the bottom of that cove was soft, and largely composed of clay, especially at points where it attained as great a depth as that where the yacht was moored.

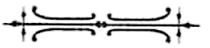
Clay is impressionable. It will receive and hold the shape of an article which rests upon it a considerable time, and the detective argued that if the *Shadow*, as she was called, had at any moment rested upon the bottom at that particular point, she would have left her mark there. That she was a submarine, or at least was capable of diving beneath the surface and remaining there for some time, he had not a doubt. The very fact that she had approached the *Goalong* so silently that her proximity was not suspected was sufficiently satisfactory of that idea to him.

The water was, fortunately, unusually clear, and Nick had no difficulty in examining the bottom almost at his leisure. When he came to the surface again, and climbed up on the deck to a seat beside his friend, he remarked:

"Well, Max, it is as I thought. Your pirate craft is some sort of a submarine."

"Is she? How do you know that? Have you seen her?"

"Well, not exactly."



"I didn't know but that was why you stayed under water so long. I thought maybe you had gone after her."

"Well, you weren't far wrong, at that. I figured that if she could dive, that was pretty nearly the explanation of how she approached you so silently, and, following up that idea, I decided that if she did dive, she must have left a mark of some kind on the bottom not far from that buoy."

"And you found one, eh?"

"Yes, I found one."

"What was it?"

"Merely the impression of her keel in the clay at the bottom."

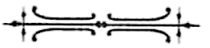
"And I suppose that from that impression, which would mean nothing at all to me, you have read enough facts about the pirate to fill quite a respectable book, eh?"

Nick laughed.

"No, Max," he said. "For once you are wrong, and for once I did not find anything more than you would have discovered had you gone there in my place. All I know from what I saw there is that a vessel's keel has rested on the bottom within the last twenty-four hours. I could tell, of course, approximately, her length, and from that could make a good guess at her breadth of beam, but you have already done that for me. Now, old chap, let's get into our clothes."

Fifteen minutes later, they were reclothed and seated again in their favorite chairs under the awning.

"And now, Nick, what next?" asked Kane.



"First, tell me what yacht is that one, heading in here toward the anchorage?" replied Nick, pointing over Kane's shoulder.

"Oh, that? She is Burton's auxiliary, the *Harkaway*," replied Kane. "There will be half a dozen more of them in here before sundown. There is a regular meeting of the club to-night, and I shouldn't wonder if there would be a score or more of yachts in here between now and midnight."

"If the pirate only knew that, it might prove to be a harvest for him, don't you think?" asked Nick.

"Oh, I don't know about that. There would be too many of them for him, wouldn't there?"

"Not if he is a submarine, and he is one. And say, Max, that thought suggests a question."

"What is it?"

"Does the count happen to know about that meeting?"

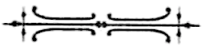
"What meeting? Oh, you mean the club meeting?"

"Certainly. You just referred to it."

"Why, yes. I suppose he knows about it. He has heard me say that I wished to be at the meeting to-night."

"So he also knows that there will be a lot of craft at this anchorage to-night, and that the owners and guests from them, almost to an individual, will be ashore at the club-house, doesn't he?"

"I have never regarded him as a fool, Nick, and he would have to be pretty near one if he didn't know that."



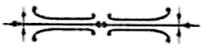
"And I suppose, Max, that you are looking forward to creating a sensation when you tell the bunch about how you were boarded by a pirate and robbed like a gentleman, eh?"

"Why, yes——"

"It is too bad to take that privilege from you, old man, but I really wish you would say nothing whatever about it, and that you would caution your wife and guests to observe the same silence. I will only hold you to that for to-night. To-morrow you can tell the whole world about it if you like."

"But why so mighty secret about it to-night, Nick?"

"Because, Max, I expect that the pirate will make another call on the fleet to-night. It would be a splendid time for him to come; and if he happens to have any idea of putting in an appearance, I would rather not have the whole bunch of owners and their friends rush to their vessels from the club-house, after hearing your story, just in time to spoil the pirate's plans. I would rather he'd have the coast clear for to-night, if he does intend to come, and if you yapped about the business the scene might be spoiled."



CHAPTER VI.
CAPTAIN SPARKLE'S SECOND VICTIM.

Max," said Nick, after a pause, during which he had been watching the maneuvers of the *Harkaway* as she came to her buoy on the anchorage, "I have not asked the question before, because I thought there was no need; but have you ever heard the suggestion that there was a pirate in this part of the world, before you met with your own experience?"

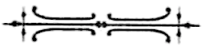
"Never."

"It is a pretty sure thing, isn't it, that if somebody else had run afoul of him as you did, you would have heard of it?"

"I think it is; unless some other fellow has been boarded who felt about as cheap as I do about it, and has resolved to keep it to himself until somebody else speaks. That is why I had made up my mind to let out the whole thing at the club meeting to-night."

"But, even in that case, the information would have been likely to leak out, don't you suppose?"

"I certainly do."



"I imagine there is a beginning to the career of a pirate, the same as there would be the beginning of a career in other professions, don't you?"

"Naturally."

"And has it occurred to you that the fellow was sort of getting his hand in on you?"

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"Eh? What is that?"

"That he was practising on you?"

"Maybe he was. You can search me."

"You see, if there had been other robberies, we would have heard of it. If that pirate had been doing this sort of thing for an indefinite time, somebody would have talked about it before this, so I think it is safe to suppose that you have the honor of being Captain Sparkle's first victim."

"I have had that idea myself, Nick. Hello! What's the matter with Burton?"

"He seems to be wigwagging you," remarked Nick, turning his head so he could observe the owner of the *Harkaway*.

"Well, I wish he would have himself put aboard here, and do his talking like a Christian. I never could get that wigwagging business into my head," growled Kane.

"I'll read it for you," said Nick.

"I wish to goodness you would."

After a moment of attentive observation, Nick rose from his chair and went to the rail, from which place he also went

through with a series of pantomimic gestures, and for several moments this was kept up between him and Burton, aboard the other yacht. Then he turned again to his host.

"Your friend Burton wigwags that he has met the pirate," he said quietly.

"The devil he does!" replied Kane.

"I have suggested to him that he say as little about it as possible for the present, and that he order his men to keep silent, also; and I have taken the liberty to ask him to come aboard here at once and tell us all about it."

"I'm mighty glad you did that."

"Here he comes now. He will be here in a moment."

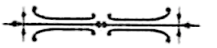
"I'm jolly glad we have got the *Goalong* to ourselves," said Kane.

He rose then, and went to the side, where he awaited the arrival of his friend.

"Glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Burton," said the detective, when they were introduced. "I hope you appreciated the logic of my suggestions while we were wigwagging each other."

"Entirely so. Like you, I think it is well to keep quiet about it for awhile. At least, until we all get together at the meeting to-night."

"And even then, also," said Nick. "Mr. Kane was boarded and robbed by the pirate last night, while the *Goalong* was lying at this very buoy. He went to the city after me this morning, and we think that we already have some ideas about



the new rover of the seas—or shall we call him 'The Pirate of the Sound'?"

"That seems to be as good a title as any. So you were robbed, eh, Kane?"

"Yes; last night. Just as Carter says."

"Have you ever heard that anybody else has met the fellow?"

"No; I have not."

"Nor I. We must be the first ones on his list."

"That is what Carter and I were just saying."

"He tackled you right here at the anchorage, eh?"

"Yes."

"And now, if you don't mind, I would like to put in a word," said Nick.

"All right, Mr. Carter," replied Burton. "Please consider that I am at your orders."

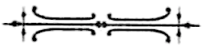
"Where did you meet with the pirate?"

"Right out in the middle of the Sound, about off Hempstead Bay."

"When?"

"Just at the break of day."

"How did he approach you? How did he come aboard?"



"As for the manner in which he approached me, I have only the account of my men to rely upon, for I was asleep in my berth at the time."

"Tell me, then, what was told you about it."

"Simmons—he's my captain—tells me that it was just coming daylight when he noticed a strange-looking craft lying directly across our bows, half a dozen cable-lengths ahead of us. We were going under half-speed at the time, and Simmons had just taken in his lights.

"He whistled to pass to starboard, and put his helm over for that purpose, when, much to his surprise, the stranger backed swiftly, so that he kept directly across our course.

"Simmons didn't know what to make of that, so he whistled to pass to port, and changed his course to do that, thinking that perhaps the stranger's engines were disabled, or something of that kind."

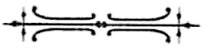
"Well?"

"The strange-looking craft, instead of replying to Simmons' signal, shot ahead, and again laid across our course, and by this time Simmons had approached so closely that he was compelled to reverse his engines in order to avoid a collision.

"He only escaped one by a hair's breadth, too. When we came to a stop, there wasn't more than two or three fathoms between us and the other craft."

"A narrow shave, eh?"

"Yes. By this time I had been roused by the blowing of our whistle, and I went on deck, half-dressed. There are no ladies on board the *Harkaway*. And I made my appearance just in



time to see the amidships turret of the stranger thrown open and half a dozen men appear on her deck."

"Your captain's first idea was anger at the stranger, I suppose?"

"Naturally; and he told them what he thought of their carelessness in the choicest sort of phrase, but they paid no more attention to him than you would to a honey-bee; and the next thing we knew was that we had drifted alongside, and the stranger had made fast to us.

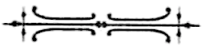
"You see, Mr. Carter, it was all done so quickly and so deftly, and was so totally unexpected, that we had no time to prevent it, even if we had been on our guard after the first discovery of the pirate; and we had no sooner touched and they had their lines fast, than half a dozen of their men leaped aboard of us."

"Were they masked?" asked Kane.

"Yes, masked, and armed, too, with rifles. They covered the whole lot of us in a jiffy; and more than that, their captain, who now appeared on the deck of the pirate, sang out to us, and at the same time pointed at his amidships turret—the one I mentioned a moment ago.

"Say, Kane, I'll give you my word that I thought then that the whole thing was a huge joke of some sort that somebody was attempting to play on me. It looked like a scene out of a melodrama, or an opera. It's a wonder I didn't laugh; only I was too angry to do that, you know."

"Tell me about it," said Nick.



"Well, there were the six masked men on our own deck, with six ugly-looking rifles aimed at us. And there was the captain of the pirate vessel, standing at ease on his own deck, dressed like a revival of *Hamlet* who had been dipped in crimson dye, for he was as red as a poppy; and there, in the amidships turret, was the prettiest-looking brass-mouthed, rapid-fire gun you ever saw, frowning upon us."

"Gee! That is more than he treated me to!" said Kane.

"Well, it was there, all right. There was another pirate standing at the breech, too, ready to set the thing going if he was ordered to do so.

"The pirate chief was pointing at it when he sang out to us, and what he said was this:

"'My men have orders to fire if you make the slightest show of resistance; and, you see, that with this machine-gun, I could mow you down without mercy. Take my advice and keep quiet, and I promise you that no one shall be injured.'

"'Who the devil are you?' I demanded.

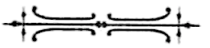
"He made no reply to that, but swung himself aboard the yacht and walked directly up to me.

"'You are Mr. Philip Burton, are you not?' he asked; and I ——"

"Wait a minute, Burton," interrupted Kane. "Did you notice anything familiar about his voice—eh?"

"Not just at that moment; but later—before he went away—I say, you know, it's a devilish mean thing for me to say, Kane."

"Say it all the same. Did he remind you of me, perhaps?"



"No; but he did remind me of that chap you brought aboard the *Harkaway* the other evening at Newport."

"Do you mean Count Cadillac?"

"Yes, Kane, I mean the count. I suppose he is here with you, is he not?"

"Yes. He has gone ashore with the ladies just at present. But never mind all that. Go ahead with your affair."

"I hope you will pardon me for——"

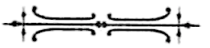
"Oh, bosh! We've been through all that. The count knows all about it, too. He—the pirate, I mean—reminded us of the count, too. The count saw it himself. That was why I asked you the question. He won't be offended. Go on with your yarn."

"Well, as I was saying, he asked me if I was Burton, and I replied that I was. Then he made me a bow that would have made Harry Lehr green with envy, and replied:

"'Permit me to introduce myself. I am Captain Sparkle, of the pirate cruiser *Shadow*. I will have to trouble you to the extent of collecting such valuables and cash as you may happen to have aboard, and I trust you will understand that this is no joke; in fact, that I am very much in earnest.'

"'You at least have that appearance—all save your costume,' I said to him; but he paid no attention to that remark.

"'My men will now make the collection,' he continued; 'and I wish to assure you that nobody will be molested unless resistance is offered, in which case I shall not hesitate to shed blood if necessary.'



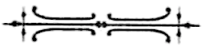
"'Well,' I said, 'since you seem to have the drop on me, go ahead.'

"He ordered my men aft, under the awning, after asking me if there were others below anywhere, and being assured that I was alone, save for my crew. Then two of his men stood guard over us while the others did the looting. And say, they did it to the queen's taste, too. I haven't got a thing left aboard which would pawn for a twenty-dollar note, so help me!

"They carted the things to the deck in sacks, and sheets, and pillow-cases, and any old thing they could discover to put them in, and they took all the silver I had, all my prize cups, half a dozen cases of that old port which I consider priceless, and, in fact, everything they could lay their hands on. Then, before they went away, one of the men lifted my watch, my pin, about seven hundred in cash which I happened to have about me, and even my links. Now, what do you think of that?"

"What next?"

"What next! What do you want next? Isn't that enough? There wasn't any 'next,' save that Captain Sparkle went aboard of his own craft, following his men, disappeared below, pulled down the turret covers after him, and sped away like a shot out of a gun. Say, Kane, that *Shadow* is the fastest thing I ever saw. She could go around me twice in ten miles, and I'm not taking any dust off the ocean from anybody around here, as you know. Well, that's my story. I thought I'd take a flier over here and tell the boys about it. Just fancy! A pirate! In Long Island Sound! In the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and six! Who would believe it? Eh?"



CHAPTER VII.
WAITING FOR THE PIRATE'S ATTACK.

Now, Mr. Burton," said the detective, when the story was finished, "I wish you would do me a favor."

"Certainly. What will it be, Mr. Carter?"

"I wish you would keep your men aboard the yacht for the remainder of the day and evening, for one thing."

"I'll do that, certainly."

"And, in addition to that, instruct them to say nothing of what has happened to anybody, on pain of dismissal."

"All right; and that, also."

"Next, I wish you would keep silent yourself—until to-morrow morning."

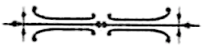
"Humph! Well, all right. It spoils a good story, however."

"It is possible that we may have a better one to tell by that time."

"How is that?"

"I suppose you are aware who I am, are you not?"

"Yes."



"Detectives are always excusable for having theories."

"Sure! If they had no theories, they would never have facts, would they?"

"Probably not. Now, I've got a theory about this matter, although it is built upon a very weak and tottering foundation. However, if my theory happens to be a good one—that is, if it amounts to anything at all, it will bring Captain Sparkle into this harbor to-night, among the fleet which will be anchored here."

"You don't mean it!"

"I do mean it—provided my theory is correct. If it is false, he will not come, and in that way I will know that it is false."

"While if he does come, you will know that it is correct?"

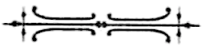
"Not positively; but I will be pretty well satisfied on that point."

"All right."

"Now, if there should happen to be much talk at the club to-night about this pirate and his daring robberies, the owners of the yachts would make a rush for their craft anchored here. They would desert the club-house, go aboard their vessels, arm themselves, and wait up the whole night in the expectation of seeing the pirate. It is true that they would make more or less of a joke of it, but they would do it all the same, and in that case, if my theory still holds good, the pirate chief would receive a signal of some kind, and he would not show up."

"I see the point, only I don't understand about the signal."

"That is a part of my theory."



"Do I understand you to mean that some person connected with the club is in league with the pirate, and would notify him not to appear?"

"No; I do not exactly mean all that. But my meaning is near enough to that idea, so that I wish nothing to be said at present."

"Very good. I'll be mum."

"Now, I wish you two to go ashore together. I want you, Kane, to call up my house over the telephone, and get my assistant, Chick, on the other end of the wire. Ask him to come out here as soon as possible, by rail. He can get here in about fifty minutes."

"Yes."

"Please arrange to meet him somewhere—at the station would be the best place—and bring him quietly to the yacht."

"Here, you mean? To the *Goalong*?"

"Yes."

"Very good."

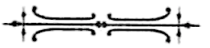
"Then go back to the club-house and stay there until I send for you."

"Humph! What the devil—— I say, what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to stay here."

"And wait for the pirate to show up?"

"Yes."



"Alone?"

"No; I will have Chick with me."

"Well, I register a kick, Carter."

"Why so?"

"Because I wish to be here, too, to see the fun. If you will make that amendment to your orders, I'm your man."

Nick shook his head negatively.

"I am afraid that won't do," he said. "You see, if you do that, you'll end by having the ladies, the count, and perhaps half a dozen guests out here, and I don't want them—particularly one of them. You understand."

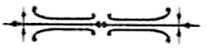
"Yes. But if I could assure you that we would not be troubled—eh? If Burton, here, will do the ashore act for me, and I can arrange it so that we won't be bothered—eh?"

"Why, in that case I will have no objections."

"All right. I'll go now. Come along, Burton. We'll stop at your yacht on the way, and give your men the necessary orders. Hello! It is about time we were doing it, too. There comes Myers with the *Wyoming*, and if I am not mistaken, that is Harcourt out beyond him."

As he was about to leave the deck of the yacht to leap into the gig awaiting him, he added:

"I'll attend to that telephone, old chap, and I will bring Chick out to you the minute he arrives. I'll head off the women, too, and I'll see to it that we are not disturbed out here to-night. I only hope the pirate will show up."



"I think he will," replied Nick.

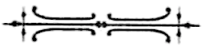
When the detective was alone, he seated himself, with a freshly lighted cigar, to think.

"I never built up a theory upon so small a fact before," he mused. "If anybody else suggested the like of it to me, I would not entertain it; but, all the same, I think intuition has a great deal to do with our decisions in life, and if intuition amounts to a thing, it is as sure as shooting that Count Cadillac has got something to do with that pirate. It is only a guess, pure and simple, but I have won out more than once on a guess, and, in this particular matter, I can't hurt the count any by making it, while I may help myself a good deal. The pirate might come in here to-night, anyhow, even if the count has nothing to do with him, for if he is keeping tabs very closely on things, he must know that a lot of yachts will anchor here in the next few hours; but if, on the other hand, the count has got something to do with him, and there should be grounds for alarm, he would find a way to notify Mr. Pirate to keep off the grass for to-night."

The afternoon waned and merged into evening. The shadows fell, and night was at hand. The stars came out, and, with them, a small boat pushed off from the shore and approached the yacht.

A few moments later Kane, accompanied by Chick, came aboard. In the meantime, many yachts and craft had entered the little harbor anchorage, until now, as darkness fell, there was at least a score of them all told, of all sizes, shapes, and designs, and there was no doubt that by ten o'clock there would be at least half as many more.

"I suppose you have figured it all out, Nick?" said Kane, when he came aboard.



"Yes; I have been figuring a little."

"Well, I have saved you one task. I have told Chick the whole story: mine and Burton's, too."

"Good! I am glad of that."

"What time do you figure that Captain Sparkle will pay us a visit, if he comes at all?"

"Not before toward morning, I imagine."

"Why do you put it so late?"

"Well, he will suppose that many of the people here will remain at the club until late, and will still prefer to sleep aboard their yachts."

"Sure. And some of them will do that very thing. However, I have arranged for our particular outfit to remain at the club to-night; and I did another thing, too."

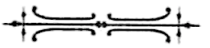
"What was that?"

"I put Burton next to that idea about the count. I had to do it, and Burton is all right, you know. If it should turn out that we are entirely mistaken about it, nobody will ever get a word about it out of Burton; you can bet your sweet life on that."

"Very good. Well, what did you do?"

"I told Burton to stick tighter than a brother to the count all the evening, and to keep him and some of the other fellows going till the wee small hours of the morning at that. I don't want him to get an opportunity to do any of that signaling you talked about."

"Nor I."



"Then I played up sick. Knocked out, you know. Said I was coming off to the yacht and turn in."

"That was a good idea, too."

"Now, Nick, what is the next thing?"

"The next thing is to wait."

"That is about the hardest thing in the world to do."

"That is what we will have to do for the present.

There won't be anything doing at the pirate's end of the string before two o'clock—if there is then."

"You are not as confident as you were, are you?"

"Oh, yes, I am; but we can never be certain, you know."

"What is the game, Nick?" asked Chick quietly.

"We will put on our bathing-suits about midnight, I think," replied the detective.

"Going to take another swim?" asked Kane.

"Why, yes; I think so; we will if the pirate shows up around here."

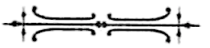
"Going to swim aboard of him?"

"Just that. If he shows up, I am going aboard of his boat."

"And then what?"

"I don't know. Events will have to determine that for me."

"Are you going to take me with you?"



It was Kane who asked the question, and Nick looked at him quietly before he replied.

Then he said:

"I don't know about that, Max. I fancy that we will get into considerable of a scrap before we get out of the *Shadow*, if we get inside of her."

"All the better. I'm a good man to have around in a scrap."

"I know that; but I hardly think that Mrs. Kane would thank me——"

"Oh, bother Mrs. Kane! I'm with you to a finish in this thing, Nick. Put your dollars on that."

"Well," laughed the detective, "I cannot keep you from following me, if I start once. Only I have got this to say: If you do follow me, you must obey me as implicitly as Chick does. From that moment I will be boss, and if you don't do as I say, I'll——"

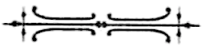
"Never mind what you'll do. You won't have occasion."

"All right. Now, tell me, which one of all the yachts anchored here would provide the pirate chief with the richest haul? Can you tell me that?"

"Why, yes. There isn't the slightest doubt about the answer to that question."

"All the better. If there is no doubt about it, then the pirate's information would be as good as ours—eh? Now, which one fills the bill?"

"The *Aurora*. She belongs to Sam Kearney, you know."



"Yes."

"He carries no end of all sorts of priceless things. He's got a solid gold dinner set, and all that. Besides, just now he is entertaining a large party, and there must be a couple of hundred thousand worth of jewels aboard, at least."

"And what about his party? Are they all ashore?"

"Every last one of them. They'll stay ashore, too. They always do. Sam is a great fellow for getting up dinners himself. He likes to cook, and it is one of his fads to bring his parties here, oust the chef, and do the cooking for them. He's doing it now."

"The whole club knows that, I suppose."

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"The whole world knows it, I imagine. He makes no bones of it. One of his regrets about my supposed illness to-night was that I could not eat some new dish he has learned to prepare, but I told him I was sick enough as it was. Oh, Sam and his party are booked for the night, all right."

"Good!" said Nick. "I think we'll keep watch over the *Aurora*!"

CHAPTER VIII.
BOARDING THE PIRATE CRUISER.

At midnight the three watchers put on the bathing-suits which were supplied by Maxwell Kane, and then seated themselves again on the after-deck, to await developments.

"What I want to know is, how are we going to carry any guns with us, with this rig?" asked Kane, as they seated themselves, and Nick asked Chick if he had supplied himself with weapons.

"I think that two apiece will be sufficient," replied Nick, "and you can easily carry them."

"But how?"

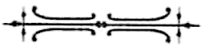
"In a belt around your body. See? Here is mine," and he lifted his belt from another chair. "I shall buckle that around me before we go into the water."

"But they will get wet."

"Sure."

"Won't they be useless after that?"

"Hardly. Get yours, and I will load them for you with my cartridges. You could soak them in water for a week, and they would do their work just as well after that."



For an hour and a half they talked upon random subjects, but all the time the keen eyes of the detective never wandered from the water of the cove. He had brought his watch on deck with him, and from time to time he glanced at it.

"It is two o'clock," he announced, after an unusually long silence between them. "I think we will make a move now, if you are ready."

"Ready," they each replied.

"Are you a good swimmer, Max?" asked Nick.

"The best that ever was," was the reply.

"All right. I'm going to take the lead in this affair. Chick will follow me, and you will follow behind him."

"All right. Where— —"

"You will take your cues from Chick. Whatever you see him do, you will copy without delay. Understand that?"

"Yes; it's plain enough. Where— —"

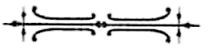
"If he dives, you are to dive, and you are to follow him under the water wherever he goes. No matter what he does, you do it, too."

"I will. Now, confound it, tell me where you are going?"

"To the *Aurora*."

"You haven't seen any sign of the pirate, have you? I haven't."

"No."



"Then what makes you so certain that the *Aurora* is the place to go?"

"I think, from what you have said, that she is the yacht which will be the object of attack, if an attack is made; but, anyhow, her position is much better than ours. She is farther out and she lies so that she will be first in line for attack, even if the pirate has no direct information about her."

"But the watch will see us come aboard, and there will be the devil to pay."

"I have just told you that you are to do as Chick and I do; however, I may as well tell you that I am not going aboard of her."

"Oh! You are not?"

"Max, there is only one way to capture this pirate and his ship as well, if he does enter this harbor to-night, and that is to go aboard of the *Shadow*."

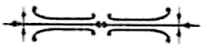
"I'm onto that, all right."

"I shall, therefore, not make the slightest effort to prevent him and his men from looting the *Aurora* from stem to stern, if they care to do so. It will be while they are up to that trick, or one like it, that we will get in our fine work."

"You might as well tell me something about what that will be before we take to the water. I will be all the better able to obey orders in that case."

"Very well; listen."

"I'm listening."



"We will swim out to the *Aurora*. When we get within a reasonable distance from her, we will dive, and not come to the surface again until we are under her chains. In that way we will avoid observation from her deck."

"Sure."

"Fortunately, it is a warm night, and the water is quite warm, also, but I don't think it will be necessary for us to remain in the water all the time."

"Thank goodness for that."

"A yacht like the *Aurora* is not very well guarded when she is at anchor in a place of this kind."

"Huh! I know that only too well."

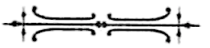
"Fortunately, the tide is coming in, and her bow points toward the open Sound. It will be high and slack in a couple of hours, so under her bow will be the best vantage ground for us, and it will be the least-guarded part of the yacht."

"I know that. You mean to get aboard of her, don't you, and to keep watch from there?"

"If it is practicable, yes."

The detective buckled his belt around him, and then let himself carefully down over the side into the water. His companions did the same, and in another moment they were swimming silently toward the *Aurora*.

There was no moon, fortunately, for the weather had changed into one of those still, but cloudy, nights which often precede a storm; and yet there was a bright moon shining somewhere back of the clouds, and sufficient of its brilliancy



penetrated them so that floating objects upon the water could be seen at a considerable distance.

At a distance of about a cable's length from the *Aurora* the three men disappeared under the water, and they did not reappear until they were well under the chains of the *Aurora*; and there they paused a moment and held a whispered consultation.

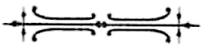
The surface of the cove, and of the Sound out beyond it, was as smooth as glass. There was not a ripple any where to be seen, and the detective knew that if the pirate attempted to approach on the surface of the water, his craft would create a ripple which a close watcher would surely discover.

On the other hand, if he should approach under the water, as the detective had no doubt he would do, he would in all probability observe his previous program, and come to the surface close under the bow of the vessel he intended to attack.

"In that case," he argued, "he will be right where we want him. But it is too early yet. Wait here until I climb aboard the *Aurora*, and if all is clear I will call you up there, and we will do our waiting on the deck."

He found that all was clear, and in another moment the three were together on the deck of Sam Kearney's floating palace. After that there followed another period of waiting, although it was a short one.

Scarcely half an hour had passed when Nick suddenly seized Chick by the arm and pointed toward a black object which seemed to be floating on the water, and which was plainly drifting directly toward them.



"It is the amidships turret," he whispered. "It is the only thing about her which shows above the water, and the man who is doing the steering is doubtless looking directly at the bow of this yacht; so be careful. He will discover the slightest motion we make, if we do not keep well out of sight. Follow me."

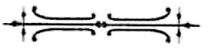
He turned and crawled away on his belly, wriggling along like a snake, until he was well out of sight behind the capstan. Then, rising to his knees, he made his way rapidly to the vessel's rail and softly let himself down into the water.

There was not a splash or a sound, and his companions were equally fortunate.

As soon as the detective was in the water, one stroke took him a fathom nearer to the bow of the yacht, and he saw that the pirate craft was swinging silently, as if she were on a pivot affixed amidships, so that she would eventually lie directly across the yacht's bow, but still with her stem pointed seaward, so that she could start ahead on the instant, and shoot away out of danger.

"She must be provided with the Kuhnstader propeller to do that," he whispered in Kane's ear. "It is a double propeller, and the one farthest aft works on a knuckle-joint, so that it can be made to serve as a rudder as well as a propeller. And it must be very deep in the water, too, to work so silently. Come on."

He sank out of sight in the water, and swam with powerful strokes toward the stern of the *Shadow*. He had noticed how far he would have to go before he went under the water, and accordingly, when he did rise to the surface, he was about ten feet, or a trifle more, abaft of the stern of the vessel.



"See!" he whispered to Kane, who had risen to the surface close beside him. "Captain Sparkle is already climbing aboard the *Aurora*, and I don't wonder that he surprised you, Kane, when he paid his visit to you. There has not been a sound made by his vessel, loud enough to wake a sleeping dog. You hadn't a ghost of a show. By Jove! but I am anxious to see the interior of that craft."

"How are you going to do it?"

"Follow, as I told you, and you will soon see."

Again he sank beneath the surface, but this time he was under only a moment, and, when he reappeared, he was directly abeam of the amidships turret, and his companions were beside him.

"You see," he whispered, treading water silently; "they won't have occasion to make use of that machine-gun of theirs to-night, and they know it. In all probability the amidships turret is unguarded; or even if there is a man there, his eyes are intently fixed on the *Aurora*. He won't think of trouble from this side. Come on, now!"

He swam quickly to the side of the vessel.

She was so low in the water that it was an easy matter for them to reach and seize hold of the rail which has already been described. In another moment the three men had hauled themselves aboard of the *Shadow*, and then, gliding along like so many shadows themselves, they passed through the open turret into the interior of the pirate cruiser.

CHAPTER IX.
THE PIRATE CHIEFTAIN UNMASKED.

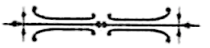
The interior of the turret was as dark as a pocket, but the detective quickly discovered the door which communicated with the interior of the vessel proper, and he opened it. Contrary to his expectations, he found himself then inside a brilliantly lighted section of the vessel, which he recognized at a glance to be the general assembling-room—the apartment used by the pirates for their general uses.

It was, in fact, in the form of a miniature social hall of a great steamship, and even the detective was amazed to see the sumptuousness with which it was furnished and decorated. It might have done service as a compartment in the palace of a prince, so perfect were its appointments. But the thing which interested the detective most just then was the fact that there was not a human being to be seen, not a sign of one, beyond the general significance of the place itself.

"Come!" he whispered. "It will never do for us to remain here. They will be bringing their spoils aboard presently, and we must be well concealed before that time."

"Are you going to remain here?" asked Kane also in a whisper.

"Sure! What do you suppose I took all that trouble to get here for?"



"Why, to have it out with the pirate—to have a scrap with him at once, capture his ship and cargo, and all that."

"We will do that later. Just now we have other axes to grind."

He glided rapidly aft toward a door he saw in the bulkhead, opened it cautiously, and peered through. But instantly he started back, and, seizing Chick and Kane with either hand, forced them underneath the long table behind them.

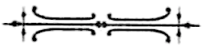
And they were not a moment too soon. The door which he had partially opened was thrown wide ajar this time, and a woman appeared on the threshold. She paused there for a moment, and the detective, from his position under the table, could see her plainly.

His mental comment at that moment was that it would not do to say that she was beautiful, merely because her face was too strong for that adjective; but she was certainly handsome. She was tall and well formed, and her hair and eyes were as black as night, while her skin was as white as that which you often see on people with red hair.

For a moment she stood there in the doorway, while her great, round, black eyes took in every detail of the cabin she was surveying.

"I surely thought I heard somebody here," Nick heard her murmur. "Doubtless it was one of the men."

Again she looked around her searchingly. Then she turned, and seemed to study the room she had quitted, as if she were undecided what to do; but, after a moment of hesitation, she came into the room where Nick and his companions were concealed under the table, closed the door after her, and walked



rapidly through toward the turret door by which the detective had effected an entrance.

Nick changed his position so that he could watch her, and he saw that she hesitated again at the turret door; but it was at once evident that her curiosity was too much for her judgment, for, after an instant, she pushed the door open in front of her, and disappeared through it, closing it behind her.

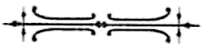
"Now is our opportunity," said Nick. "Quick! Follow me!"

He darted from under the table, glided rapidly toward the door through which the woman had first made her appearance, and in an instant, followed by Chick and Kane, passed through into the after-cabin of the vessel.

And if the other one was sumptuous in its appointments, this one put it entirely in the shade. It was veritably a palace—the palace of a queen, too; but evidently of a queen who was provided with a prince consort, for there were many evidences about of masculine uses.

There were cigarettes and cigars upon the table in the center of the room. There was a piano built into the bulkhead at one end of it. There was an electric drop light burning on the table, and there were comfortable chairs, books, papers, periodicals, and articles of various kinds and uses scattered about everywhere.

At one side of the center-table there was a chess-stand, with the ivory men in such a position as to indicate that a game had been interrupted in order that the *Aurora* might be looted; and there were pictures and hangings and other decorations in the compartment, which showed that it was the abode of refinement, as well as of a pirate.



All these things the detective noticed in his first searching glance around him.

"That woman was afraid to go outside, for some reason," he said to the others. "She did not wish the captain of this craft to see her, and so it follows that she won't be gone more than a minute or two; but there must be another cabin aft of this one—at least, there is sure to be a couple of staterooms."

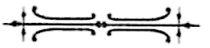
He started forward as he spoke, and, pushing aside a hanging drapery, found himself in a narrow gangway, or passage, with an open door of a stateroom on either side of him. But a glance told him that these were the rooms occupied by the two people he most wished to avoid until he had heard enough of what they might have to say to each other to determine him how to act.

Beyond these, however, there were other doors—two of them—and, as before, one on either side. These were closed, and he decided at once that they were not in constant use. He opened one of them at the same time that he pointed toward the other.

"Go in there," he directed, and so it happened that Chick and Kane went together into one of the rooms, while Nick found himself alone in the remaining one.

And then, just as he pulled the door shut behind him—that is, he closed it all but the merest crack—the noise of the opening and closing of the door of the outer cabin apprised him of the fact that the woman had returned.

He supposed that she would return to the table and seat herself there, while she awaited the return of the pirate chief from his expedition aboard the *Aurora*; but in that he was



mistaken. He was peering through the crack left him by not quite closing his own door, and he could see past an aperture at the side of the portière at the end of the passage that the woman was coming straight toward it.

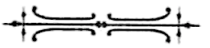
He watched her without moving.

He hoped that she would not come to his door, or visit that of the room in which his companions had taken refuge, but he was thoroughly prepared to receive her if she should do either the one thing or the other.

The detective had seen enough already to make him wish to see and hear much more. The mere capture of the pirate vessel and those who were aboard of her was now not sufficient to satisfy him, for he realized that he would then have only a part of the explanation of the unheard-of circumstance of a pirate roaming the waters of Long Island Sound.

On the other hand, he figured that if he could remain where he was a sufficient length of time without discovery there might be an opportunity for a complete investigation—or, at least, that he would hear enough of conversation between the pirate chief and the woman to inform him.

"But," he thought to himself, "there must somewhere be a port for this vessel. She must have some place somewhere, to lay by and rest, and to permit her crew to rest. I hardly suppose that she goes to the bottom of the Sound and rests there, and it is certain that she could not visit a frequented port without attracting attention which would be fatal. Therefore, she must go somewhere. She must have a port; and, in all likelihood, she will go directly to that port when she leaves the vicinity of this harbor.



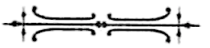
"Now, if she does go to such a place, it is more than likely that the pirate and his wife—or whatever she is to him—will go ashore, and that is, the opportunity I want. Just give me half an hour of undisturbed opportunity aboard this vessel, and I will read every secret its owner ever had. Ah!"

All these thoughts passed through his brain while he was watching the woman's approach, and the concluding exclamation he uttered—or thought, for he made no sound—was caused by her hastening directly to the door behind which he was concealed.

Just outside of it she came to an abrupt halt, and the detective drew back and flattened himself as closely as possible against the bulkhead, in order that if she did decide to enter the stateroom where he was concealed, he might remain undiscovered for as long a time as possible.

But whatever the thoughts were which troubled her, and gave rise to the hesitation under which she seemed to be struggling, they were of short duration; for, although she stretched out her hand until it touched the door, she withdrew it again, and then, after sighing deeply, turned and retraced her steps to the cabin.

The detective opened his door again, and stepped out far enough into the passageway to discover that the woman had resumed the reading of a book, which had been left lying open on the table, and he decided that in all probability she would not leave her chair again for some time to come; at least, not until the work of the pirates in looting the *Aurora* was finished and the chief returned to the cabin and to her. Satisfied on that point, and perceiving that the woman's back was toward him,



he went inside the cabin in which he had taken refuge, and without hesitation turned on the electric light.

He believed this to be as good a time as any in which to search the cabin in which he found himself, and he had already perceived that, although it was one which did not appear to be permanently occupied, it nevertheless, bore evidences of individual uses.

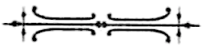
He knew, also, that he ran no apparent danger in turning on the light for a few moments, since the woman's back was toward him, and he was positive that the door beyond her, which communicated with the waist of the vessel, could not be opened without his hearing it.

The stateroom was in every way as commodious as possible in the narrow space allowed, and everything within it had been arranged by a master hand, with a view to comfort and convenience.

The berth itself was a bed; in the bulkhead at one end had been built a rosewood dresser, and at the other end a writing-desk. There was a folding Morris chair, also fashioned so that it could be made to disappear in the bulkhead, under the electric light; there was a narrow and shallow wardrobe close beside the dresser, and a steamer trunk showed its front under the edge of the narrow bed.

Nick took in all these things at a glance, and with one step he approached the dresser.

The opening of the top drawer revealed an assorted collection of a gentleman's collars, cuffs, ties, handkerchiefs, et cetera. The second drawer was filled with shirts; the third and last, with an assortment of underclothing.



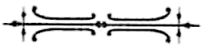
He took all this into account in one rapid survey, but it was a handkerchief on top of its fellows which chiefly attracted his attention, and which nearly caused him to utter an exclamation of surprise as well as satisfaction. The handkerchief had been folded so that the marked corner was uppermost, and the detective saw at a glance that it bore a crest, and that underneath it were the initials "J. de C."

That was a discovery worth while, he thought, but he closed the drawers quickly and crossed the stateroom to the writing-desk. In an instant he had opened that, and in another he was holding a sheet of writing-paper in his hand upon which was embossed the same crest, and the words "Château de Cadillac, Anjou, France."

"So," he mused, as he returned it to its place and closed the desk, "I have here a full and complete explanation of the mystery. My theory about the family characteristics and traits was the correct one, after all, for there is no doubt now in my mind that the chief of these pirates, the master of the *Shadow*, Captain Sparkle by name, is closely related to Jean, the Count of Cadillac—probably a brother."

He was in the act of reclosing the desk, when he heard the sound of an opening door proceeding from the cabin, and he hastily extinguished the electric light and resorted again to the aperture he had left in closing the door, so that he might see all that took place in the apartment beyond.

And then, as he gazed past the portières, he saw the erect figure of the pirate chief as he entered the cabin, arrayed in his Hamletesque costume of red; and he saw him raise his right hand, and with one gesture remove the hat and wig of blond hair from his head; and the detective could scarcely refrain



from uttering an exclamation, for the pirate chieftain stood revealed, a perfect counterpart of Count Cadillac!

CHAPTER X.
TWO COUNTS OF CADILLAC.

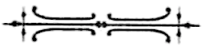
If I did not know positively that Count Cadillac is at this moment ashore at the club-house, I would be willing to swear that he stands before me yonder," was the detective's mental comment, as he gazed upon the transformation wrought by the mere removal of the hat and wig worn by the pirate chief. "As it is, there can be no doubt now that my first idea was the correct one, and that the two men are brothers—aye, twin brothers, at that."

"Well?" asked the woman of the pirate, permitting the book to rest upon her lap and raising her eyes to his face. She spoke in French, and he replied to her in the same tongue; but it was all perfectly intelligible to Nick Carter.

"It is magnificent," he replied, throwing himself into a chair opposite her, and selecting a cigar, which he proceeded to light with evident relish. "It is much better than I ever dared to hope, from one affair."

"Affair!" said the woman, with cold contempt in her voice and manner. "Why dignify your thieving operations by the use of such a word? Why not call them what they are?"

Sparkle shrugged his shoulders.



"Calm yourself, Hortense," he said, puffing lazily at his cigar. "A few more expeditions like this one to-night will render us independent. Before the season is ended, if I continue as fortunate as I have been so far, we will have collected a million, at least—perhaps two millions; and dollars, too! Think of it! That seems between five and ten million francs. Why, do you know, petite, that Alexandre Dumas only gave the Count of Monte Cristo something like ten million francs, altogether?"

The woman sighed.

"But it is robbery," she said—"robbery! There is no gentler term to apply to it. You call it making collections. You describe your piratical expeditions as 'affairs,' and you refer to our trips when we start out to accomplish this infamous work as 'excursions.' But they are not excursions, Jules!"

He waived his right hand deprecatingly.

"Whatever they may be, they are none the less necessary," he said coolly. "I will thank you to regard them so, Hortense. Think of our estates in France. Think of the opportunities which will be afforded you over there for doing unlimited good with the wealth I shall secure for you. Think——"

"Bah! Think! I do nothing else but think! I think all the time. I remember that my family was one which no stain had touched until I married you, and you dragged me into this thievish business! I remember that, although we were poor, we were proud of an illustrious past, than which nobody in France could boast a better. I remember——"

"Enough! I will not hear you!"

"And how long, pray, must this continue before you will consider that you have enough to pay your debts and to live on

the income of what is left to you after that of your stolen fortune?"

"How long? Who knows! As I have said, if other affairs prosper me as well as this one to-night has done, it will not be long. Think of it! To-night—to-night alone—I have collected almost a quarter of a million, in the value of dollars! To-night I have added to my store more than a million francs!"

"Aye; but much of it you will never be able to use."

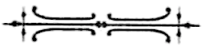
"I shall use it all. The melting-pot is ever handy; and there are other means of disposing of——"

"What, for example, shall you do with the trophy cups you have taken from some of your victims?" she demanded.

"Ah!" he replied. "They are valuable! Very valuable! I have thought out a method by which their owners can be induced to redeem them for cash at much more than their value and without danger to me. That Monsieur Kane, for example—he would gladly give fifty thousand dollars rather than lose his cups—his petted race cups. And what is fifty thousand dollars to him? Faugh! It is nothing! He would think no more of that amount than I do of the ash of this cigar, which I throw from me—so. And Monsieur Burton—oui, oui! With him it is the same. Fifty thousand? He would give a hundred thousand, so Jean tells me. And he is not as rich as Monsieur Kane! But his trophies are dearer to him. And to-night? To-night I have collected others.

Ha, Hortense! It is the millennium that is at hand for us!"

"The millennium!" she exclaimed scornfully. "Say, rather, it is Cayenne, Toulon, the Château d'If, the Bastile, or the guillotine!"



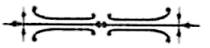
The pirate shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

"You mentioned Jean," continued the woman. "Tell me, what of him?"

"What of him? What should there be of him? He is invaluable. But for the information he gives me I could not accomplish what I do; I could have accomplished nothing of what I have already done. And he is innocent of real wrong, is he not? He tells me, merely, 'To-morrow evening Monsieur Kane will anchor at such a place with his yacht, the *Goalong*. I shall be a guest.' It is enough. He says no more than that. If I appear upon the scene and demand tribute, Jean is not to blame. Again he says to me, 'Monsieur Burton is fond of running his yacht, the *Harkaway*, through the Sound by night, when the moon is full. He likes to go at half-speed. I should not be surprised if he left Newport soon after we do so, and I am quite sure that he will be due at that same anchorage where we are going the evening following our arrival.' You see, Hortense, that is merely a comment. If I take advantage of the knowledge thus acquired, it is no fault of Jean's, is it?"

"Bah!" she exclaimed. "Such arguments! Sophistry! Lies!"

"Well? And then what? In Anjou we have our estates—Jean and I. When he is away, I am there. When I am there, he is not. Even our own people do not understand that there are two men who are so much alike that one cannot be separated from the other by strange eyes. And who, in the end, shall have it to say that the Count of Cadillac was ever a pirate? Surely, not the American millionaires who have entertained him; surely not those men who have seen him seated beside them on their own decks while the pirate was engaged in looting their treasures. And when I have collected the five or ten million francs and



taken them to France—when the fortunes of the Cadillacs are reestablished, and one or the other of us seems suddenly to reappear from far-away Peru with a story about fabulous mines owned there, which have yielded the fortune so suddenly in evidence, who will there be to say that once there was a *Shadow* on the water—a pirate, if you will—which collected this fortune for the twin brothers so happily reunited after a separation which has endured since childhood? Ah, Hortense, it is well planned. It is well schemed. It is perfect!"

The woman was quietly weeping now, and did not reply. Seeing that it was so, he left his seat and passed around the table to her side.

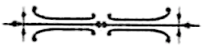
"I am sorry, petite," he said sadly. "It is robbery, I know. But it is robbery of millionaires, who will never miss what is taken from them."

He would have caressed her, but she repulsed him.

"No," she said. "Leave me. I do not know even if you are Jules. You may be Jean. When one of you is beside me I never know which one it is. It is only when you approach me together, side by side, that I know which is my husband. And you can change places with each other so deftly that I never know when you do it. Return to your chair. Remain there until you go to your room."

He laughed uneasily; but he obeyed her, and returned to his chair at the opposite side of the table.

Nick Carter witnessed this scene with varying emotions, and behind him in the passageway he knew that Chick and Kane were both standing, as deeply interested as he was. He was thinking that somewhere about the craft there were at least



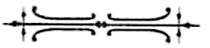
seven more men. No doubt they were forward in their own quarters. Perhaps they were in that general assembly-room.

The detective knew now that it was merely a question of opportunity when he would capture the pirate cruiser and all the men aboard of her. The game was in his own hands now, and he merely desired to hold back his trumps until the final play, in order to surprise his opponent the more.

The *Shadow* was by this time passing swiftly through the water. He knew that, because he could hear the rustling of the passing ripples along the smooth sides of the hull. But there was no motion to the craft at all. There was no jar made by machinery. The cruiser went along as silently, as swiftly, and as smoothly as if she had been a phantom.

He wondered where she was going—where the vessel was taking him and his friends—but he had no means of determining that question until she should arrive at her destination—until the hatches should be opened, and there should be an effort made on the part of the officers and crew to go on deck. But he hoped that such a time was approaching, and he believed it was, inasmuch as neither of the occupants of the cabin seemed to think of retiring. It was evident to him that they were both awaiting the arrival of the vessel at some port where she was expected to lay by and rest until the time came for her to start again upon another of her "collecting excursions."

Presently, Captain Sparkle left his chair, and the detective drew back hastily, thinking that perhaps he intended to seek his room. But he was undeceived.



"We must be approaching our anchorage," he said. "It is time I went to the wheel. I dare not trust Toto to take us inside the screen."

The woman made no reply, and he left the cabin, going forward through that other cabin by which Nick and his friends had entered the vessel.

When he was gone, the woman did not move.

She remained where he had left her, with her head bowed upon her hand, and Nick turned to Chick and made a number of pantomimic gestures, which were plainly read by his assistant. They told him as plainly as words could have done that his chief wished him to approach the woman silently from behind, and to seize her, and hold her, so that she could not move. At the same time he was to wrap a towel tightly around her face, so that it would cover her mouth, and thus prevent her from crying out, and so giving an alarm.

Chick obeyed.

He crept forward silently, and the woman was not aware of his approach until he had thrown the towel across her lips and drawn it tightly against them. And then, while she struggled, trying in vain to escape, Nick Carter stepped in front of her, and said, quietly, and in the French language:

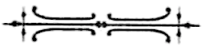
"Be calm, madame. You are in no danger, and you shall not suffer the slightest harm, I assure you."

CHAPTER XI.
THE CAPTURE OF THE PIRATE CHIEF.

This is not precisely the costume in which I should have preferred to present myself to you, madame," continued the detective, with a smile. "Bathing-suits were necessary, under the circumstances, inasmuch as we were obliged to swim out to the *Shadow* in order to get aboard of her at all. And, in order to relieve your mind, I will tell you how we did it: We came aboard at the moment when your husband—or his brother, for, like yourself, I have no idea which one of the Counts of Cadillac the gentleman who has just left you happens to be—followed by his men, boarded the *Aurora*. After that we hid beneath the table in the adjoining cabin while you went forward. When you did that, we came in here; and you know the rest.

"Now, madame, I dislike exceedingly to inconvenience you, but I must ask you to point out to me which is your own stateroom, and you must go into it, and remain there until the remainder of our work is done. That work, as you no doubt guess, is to capture the captain and crew of this vessel.

"I know that you are not a pirate in your sympathies any more than you are in fact, and I can assure you that you have



nothing to dread personally. I overheard your conversation with Captain Sparkle just now.

"You cannot answer me, so I will continue as though you had done so.

"We do not wish to be disturbed in the work we have to do, and you must not be permitted to give an alarm. Now, there are two ways to prevent you from doing so; one is to force that towel inside your jaws, and so to gag you so that you cannot cry out; but that would be an indignity which I dislike to commit. The other is to accept your word that you will not attempt to cry out, or in any way to communicate an alarm to any person on this vessel while you are inside that room. I am sure if you give your word you will keep it, for I have just heard you state that the honor of your own family is your greatest solicitude. Chick, you may take away the towel. Now, madame, will you make me the promise I require?"

"I will," she replied at once, "if you will permit me to go to my room and to lock myself inside."

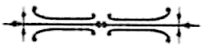
"Thank you. Will you promise me that you will make no effort to leave that room until some other person releases you?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Very good. Stand back, Chick."

The woman rose and turned away without a word. They watched her cross the cabin and enter her room, and then heard the click of the lock as she closed the door.

"I am sorry for that woman, Carter," said Maxwell Kane.



"So am I. She is the victim of circumstances, like many another woman in the world, who meets with censure because of the faults of the man she loves. And now, since there is no doubt that we have sufficient time, for the vessel has not slowed down yet, and, therefore, the captain cannot return here for some time to come, I suggest that we make use of some of the wardrobe possessed by these gentlemen who own this craft, and get out of these wet bathing-suits. Come."

When the three emerged again from the passageway into the cabin there were broad smiles on the faces of Maxwell Kane and Chick when they saw Nick Carter, and not without reason.

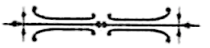
He had directed Kane to enter the stateroom into which he had himself first dodged, at the beginning of this last scene, and had selected for his own uses the one which was directly opposite that in which the woman had locked herself.

He believed that to be the room belonging to Captain Sparkle, and in that he was not mistaken. A short search among the effects of the room discovered to him another complete suit of the favorite costume of the pirate chieftain, blond wig and all, and he lost no time in arraying himself in them. True, there was no mustache and imperial with which to adorn his features, but neither was there need of them, since the red mask was there.

And thus it happened that when he returned to the cabin, where Kane and Chick were already awaiting him, he looked exactly as Captain Sparkle had appeared at the time when he so silently boarded the deck of the *Goalong* and looted the yacht.

"Now, Nick," said Kane impatiently, "what next?"

"Wait," replied the detective.



"Confound it! that is your inevitable reply, Carter, whenever I ask a question."

"Well, it is usually the correct one. If Captain Sparkle returns to this cabin before he docks or anchors the *Shadow*, we will capture him at once, but I don't think he will do that. Hark! The vessel is slowing down already. She has stopped. There! Do you feel that tremble through her? She is backing. And now the propeller has stopped. Good! There is a slight jar, probably made by the hull coming in contact with piling, or something like it. And there is the scraping noise she makes while she glides along against it. We have arrived, my friends. In a very few moments Captain Sparkle will be here."

"Good!" said Kane. "I, for one, am becoming impatient."

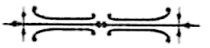
"Oblige me, both of you, by stepping into the passage, behind the portière, and you will not have to wait much longer."

They did as requested, and Nick at once dropped into the chair which the captain of the pirate cruiser had so lately occupied.

And he did not have long to wait.

Ten minutes passed, and then the detective heard the sound of approaching steps along the deck of the outer cabin, and a moment later the door was thrown ajar, and Captain Sparkle stepped into the compartment and closed it behind him.

He did not perceive Nick until he was well inside the room, and then, for an instant, he stood rooted to the spot where he was, as if his powers of motion had suddenly become paralyzed by what he saw before him. But the detective did not move.



He had raised his revolver when the pirate passed through the door, and the first intimation that Sparkle had of his presence was when he discovered an image of himself, seated in his own chair, and found that he was covered by a revolver in the grasp of that image.

"What sort of fool's play is this, Hortense?" he demanded, then. And at the same instant he took a step nearer.

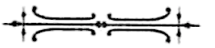
It was at once plain that he supposed that the woman, during his short absence, had attempted this masquerade, but he was quickly undeceived.

"I am not Hortense," replied Nick calmly. "Neither am I Captain Sparkle, although I do not doubt that I resemble him. Stand back, Mister Pirate, if you value your life! You are my prisoner! Chick!" he added. "Kane! Come here!"

If Sparkle had for an instant thought of throwing himself upon this daring intruder, he controlled himself. The sudden appearance of two other men upon the scene convinced him that this was no time for resistance, and he shrugged his shoulders with the utmost nonchalance, apparently, while Chick glided between him and the door through which he had entered, and Kane backed off to the opposite side of the cabin, and also covered him with a revolver.

"Which of the two Counts of Cadillac are you—Jules, or Jean?" asked Nick, still retaining his seat in the chair, but removing the mask from his face and holding it in his disengaged hand.

The pirate smiled cynically. He wore no mask, nor was there a sign of a frown upon his handsome face.



"Really, monsieur," he replied, "we are so much alike that we frequently have difficulty in determining the answer to that question ourselves. You do not believe it? No? It is quite true, I assure you. You see, I am Jean as often as I am Jules, and Jules as often as I am Jean. What will you have, eh? I am both. I am neither."

"At all events you are Captain Sparkle, the pirate."

"Ah, monsieur! Am I, indeed? I might say the same of you."

"How many men have you aboard this craft?"

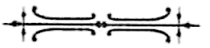
"Since an hour ago, monsieur, I have not counted them. I really do not remember."

Chick was standing behind the pirate, and now Nick Carter gave him a signal which the assistant perfectly understood. He suddenly stepped forward and seized Captain Sparkle's arms, drawing them closely together behind his body, and while he held them there the detective rose from his chair and tossed a coil of small rope toward Kane.

"I found it in the stateroom," he said. "Hold him, Kane, while Chick binds him with it."

They bound his arms tightly together behind his back. Next they seated him in one of the chairs, and tied him there so securely that it was impossible for him to move, and then they drew back and regarded their work with satisfaction. Nick left his chair now, and stood in front of the pirate; and the latter, still with the utmost calmness, asked:

"Might I be permitted to inquire what disposition you have made of Madame Cadillac?"



"She is locked in her stateroom," replied Nick. "She has not been harmed."

For a moment after that the pirate was silent, and then, with the first show of sincerity he had manifested since the beginning of the interview, he said:

"Monsieur, I do not know who or what you are, but I suspect that you are in some manner connected with the police. If that is true, I wish to assure you that, no matter how guilty you may find me to be concerning certain events which have happened in this locality, she, Madame Cadillac, is entirely innocent."

"I quite believe you," replied Nick.

"Thank you, monsieur."

"And now, will you add to that statement some further information that I desire?" asked the detective.

"No. I will tell you nothing. You seem to be quite competent to manage your own affairs. I do not even ask you how you got here, although I am extremely curious to know; but I suspect that you must have swum aboard while the *Shadow* was——"

"Lying across the bows of the *Aurora*. Exactly. You have guessed it."

"It was a daring thing to do, monsieur; and there is still a more daring one ahead of you, for while I have been seated here I have been able to press with my foot an electric button which communicates with an alarm at the forward part of the vessel. Its constant ringing has brought my men to me on the run. They are at the door. They are here! In a moment I will be free, and you will be prisoners! Ah!"

CHAPTER XII.
THE FIGHT IN THE PIRATE'S CABIN.

Although the words of warning uttered by the pirate were deliberate and emphatic, there was not a sound while he was speaking them to denote that they were true. Nevertheless, he had spoken the truth; and he had gaged the moment of interruption so exactly that even as he ceased speaking the door which communicated with the outer cabin was burst open, and three men, followed by several others, leaped in upon them.

But short as was the warning, short as was the time of preparation on the part of the detective and his companions, they were none the less prepared.

The foremost of the men who entered the cabin thus unceremoniously was a giant in stature, and Nick saw at a glance that he could not be one of the members of the regular crew, since no mention had been made to him of a person of such gigantic proportions. And here it was that the detective gained a momentary advantage, by reason of the fact that he had arrayed himself in the costume of the pirate chieftain; and it was that moment of time which brought about the final result.

When the giant burst into the room he beheld two individuals who seemed to him to be his chief. One was seated upon a chair, to which he was tightly bound; the other was almost directly in front of him.

For one instant he halted, dismayed, not knowing what to do.

But Captain Sparkle cried out to him from his chair—a quick command in French, which was as serviceable to the giant as a full and complete explanation could have been. Nevertheless, that instant of hesitation worked his ruin, for, although it was only instantaneous, it still afforded the detective time to gather himself for the attack.

As the giant sprang toward him. Nick stooped and darted past his guard, under his extended arms, and he seized him around his massive body in a grip as powerful as the giant himself could have exerted. They were oddly matched, these two. The giant towered over the detective like a Goliath over a David. The scene had the appearance of a full-grown man fighting with a half-grown boy.

But the giant was, nevertheless, lifted bodily from his feet, and he hung there, struggling vainly to touch his toes or his heels to the deck, for, like certain animals we know about, his defensive powers were fruitless if he could not get his feet to the ground.

He bellowed like a bull at first, until the pressure of Nick's powerful arms squeezed him into silence. He swung his arms about him like the blades of a windmill, and he kicked frantically with his feet in an effort to bring the detective down. His huge, animallike face turned red, then purple, then black. Blood oozed from his nostrils and mouth; and then, like the

snapping of a whip in the distance, his ribs cracked under the awful pressure which Nick put upon them.

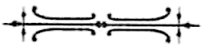
Instantly his hold upon the detective relaxed; his flaying arms dropped to his sides, useless; he gasped, and then, as Nick released him, he fell in a heap to the floor of the cabin, uttering howl after howl of rage and anguish. Like all brutes of gigantic strength, once conquered, he could fight no more, and he remained where he had fallen, moaning, helpless, whipped—and whipped into a bleeding mass of flesh by the mere pressure of the great detective's muscular arms.

Then Nick turned like a flash toward the others.

Five of the attacking party were down and out, laid where they were by the hammering fists of Maxwell Kane and Chick, for there had been no time or opportunity to make use of their revolvers, which happened to be inside their pockets when the onslaught occurred. Four more men were pressing the two fighters into one corner of the cabin, and were almost at the point of getting the upper hand of them, when Nick rushed to their assistance.

But the fighting powers of the pirates was short-lived after that happened.

Nick Carter's fist caught one of them under the ear; another went down from a blow against the side of his jaw; a third was knocked squarely into Chick's arms by a kick in the small of his back from Nick's foot, and the fourth, dismayed by what was happening around him, lost his head just long enough to give Kane an opening, and he received a well-directed blow on the end of his nose which finished him.



The fight was over, and there was no remnant of one left in any of the men who had entered that cabin so bravely to capture Nick Carter and his friends. There had been ten in all, against three; but now those ten men were bound and speedily rendered helpless, and the three stood over them, comparatively uninjured.

It is true that Kane wore a discolored lump on his right cheek, and that Chick was nursing the knuckles of his right hand tenderly; but otherwise they were uninjured.

And all this time Captain Sparkle had been compelled to sit idly by, a spectator of the downfall of his followers. However, when Nick Carter looked toward him he was smiling.

"Well, captain," said the detective, "what do you think about being free now?"

"I think," replied the pirate, with a broader smile, "that the moment will have to be postponed because of unavoidable circumstances."

"Quite right," said the detective.

The ten men captured by the detective, assisted by Maxwell Kane and Chick, proved to be the entire complement of the pirate crew; they included every man who acted under the orders of Captain Sparkle.

Seven of these comprised the crew of the *Shadow* and three were those who remained on shore at the strange harbor where she was in the habit of lying by, out of the sight and the ken of the world at large.

And this harbor was a strange one, indeed. It lies considerably to the eastward of Hempstead Bay, and any one of

those who read can readily discover the spot if he will take the trouble to journey there.

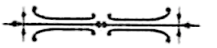
There is a place where boulders and rocks and reefs jut out of the water at low tide, capped at the outer end of the fringe by one huge one, so that the general appearance of the formation has led the residents along the shore near there to name them the Sow and Pigs. Between these two projections of rocks is a deep and narrow way, through which a vessel built after the model of the *Shadow* may pass at certain conditions of the tides.

At the base of it, or against the shore, it dips into the bluff somewhat more than a hundred feet, with a high sand-bank on either side; a barren, abrupt, precipitous bank fringed by stunted verdure, which grows down almost to the water's edge.

It was here that the detective discovered the *Shadow* to be moored. An excavation had been made in the bank on one side, and within it were found the effects taken from the *Goalong* and the *Harkaway*; on board the cruiser, of course, were still all the articles stolen from the *Aurora*.

And the pirate craft—the *Shadow*?

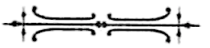
She was all that has been claimed for her. She had herself been stolen from her builders in France, at the very time when she was about to be delivered to a Russian prince, for whom she had been built. Operated by electricity, derived from storage batteries, which were supplied by a charging dynamo so that she never ran out of power, she was fleet and powerful, and half a submarine; that is, she could sink and rise again without remaining for a long time immersed; and she could skim swiftly along the surface of the water with only her turrets showing above it.



Madame Cadillac did not follow her husband to prison. She returned to France, a sadder and a much wiser woman. The count—he who was called Jean—disappeared from the clubhouse that night.

It was thought that he had somehow discovered the absence of Kane and the detective from the *Goalong*, and that he decided that it would be good policy to decamp. At all events, that is what he did do.

"Too bad!" murmured Nick. "That fellow will be up to mischief yet."

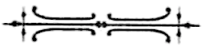


CHAPTER XIII.
THE ROVER OF THE SEAS.

It was a month later. The *Goalong* was six hours out of Hamilton, Bermuda, bound for Newport News. The time was something after six o'clock in the evening, and the sun had just sunk below the horizon, thirteen miles away. The season was the first week in September—a month during which few if any tourists ever think of visiting the Bermudas.

But Maxwell Kane had for many years been in the habit of spending a week or two of the summer season in Hamilton, because having, on one occasion, visited the place by accident at that time of the year, he had discovered that the statement frequently made by the permanent residents of the place that Bermuda was much pleasanter in the summer than in the winter was true.

Ever since that knowledge was impressed upon him he had not lost a season of rest there, away from the hurly-burly of New York, away from the heat of Gotham, which is infinitely



greater than among the islands—but, above all, away from people.

This particular day had been one of exceptional beauty, and the evening promised to excel it. The ocean was as nearly calm as it ever is, and only the long, heavy rollers, which seafaring men have named "dead swells," suggested that such things as violent storms ever visited that portion of the world.

And these swells were so far apart, so regular in their motion and so devoid of even a ripple to mar their mirror-like aspect, that the yacht seemed scarcely to feel them at all, but met them and sailed over them with the grace and ease of a living thing.

Seated under the awning on the after-deck were four people, three of whom were women, for Maxwell Kane had left men out of his plans for that trip. He liked to take his annual trip to Bermuda without men of his own class around him; and so it happened that the passengers aboard his yacht numbered merely his wife, his wife's sister, who was Miss Bessie Harlan, and Mrs. Starkweather, who was their mother.

"I do not see why you do not make directly for New York, Max," his wife had said to him when the anchor was weighed, and all preparations were made for their start, and he had replied that Newport News was nearer, and that he was going to North Carolina himself for the early shooting. "From there," he added, "you and Bessie, with your mother, can return home by rail, if you like, or you can remain on the yacht and go where you please."

And now they were six hours out from Hamilton; the sun had dropped out of sight, and the evening was upon them. Bessie Harlan left the low wicker chair in which she had been

seated and walked forward along the deck. Suddenly she paused and shaded her eyes with one hand, while she gazed steadily at some object she had discovered off the starboard bow.

"Max, come here," she called, and her brother-in-law rose lazily from his chair and strolled over beside her.

"Hello!" he said, before she could call his attention to the object which had attracted her. "You have discovered a sail, haven't you?"

"Hardly a sail," she replied. "What a strange-looking craft it is."

Maxwell Kane started. Then he raised his voice and shouted:

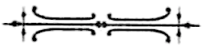
"Forward, there!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"What do you make of that craft off the starboard bow, captain?" he asked of his skipper, who now walked aft to join them.

"Well, sir," replied the skipper slowly, "if you had asked me that question a month ago—which would be about the time we had to do with a fellow of about that cut, wasn't it?—I should have replied that I thought she was a very good copy of the *Shadow*, sir."

"The *Shadow*!" gasped Bessie, turning a startled gaze upon the skipper, and then removing it to Max. "Do you mean the pirate? Do you mean Captain Sparkle?"



Kane laughed aloud, although a close observer might have detected a note of uneasiness in his merriment.

"Captain Sparkle is in Sing Sing, Bess," he said.

"He was in Sing Sing when we left New York for Bermuda," she replied.

"That craft there certainly does look like the *Shadow*," muttered the skipper. "She's bearing down upon us, too, and coming with the swiftness of the thing she's named after."

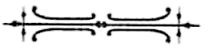
"Sparkle couldn't have escaped," said Max uneasily; "and if he had done so, he could not very well have repossessed himself of the *Shadow*, could he?"

"I can't rightly answer that question, Mr. Kane," replied the skipper. "You see, sir, I don't know any more about it than you do, seeing that I've been with you all the time, and that we left New York so soon after the capture of the pirate and his wonderful vessel, I don't even know what was done with the *Shadow*. She was libeled, wasn't she?"

"Blessed if I know," replied Kane. "There was a whole lot of red tape about the disposition of her, and I didn't remain around to find out how it did turn out. The Westchester County authorities claimed her; the New York police claimed her, and the United States district attorney claimed her. The last I knew of her, she was in charge of an inspector of the treasury department, and nobody seemed to know what would be done with her eventually."

Bessie Harlan had remained very quiet during this discussion, but now she interrupted:

"You have forgotten one thing, Max," she said.



"Well, what?"

"You have forgotten the count."

"Oh, blast the count!" was the somewhat savage rejoinder.

"All the same," continued Bessie, "the count escaped, did he not?"

"Escaped! I should say he did. Not a sign of him was seen after Nick Carter, with his assistant Chick and myself, captured Sparkle and the *Shadow*."

"Then you may depend upon it," she said, "that the Count of Cadillac has managed somehow to repossess himself of the *Shadow*. It was his craft as much as his brother's, was it not?"

"I suppose so."

"And, as a matter of fact, you never did know which of the brothers was the real count, and which was the genuine Captain Sparkle, did you?"

"No; I'm in doubt if they knew themselves apart, let alone the possibility of a third person being wise about it."

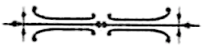
The eyes of all three were still fixed upon the approaching vessel, which was now not more than half a mile away.

"Don't you think we had better run for it?" asked Bessie now.

Kane laughed.

"Why, Bess," he said, "if that craft is the *Shadow*, we would have about as much chance of running away from her as a snail would have in a foot-race with a rabbit.

"And it is the *Shadow*, too. I recognize her now, all right."



"What shall you do, Max?" asked Bessie anxiously.

"Do? Nothing. What is there to do?"

"Are you going to let that pirate board you, and do as he pleases with you, without offering the slightest resistance?"

"Eh? Look here, Bess. In the first place, we do not know that he is a pirate, and the chances are about a thousand to one that he is not. The last we knew about the vessel—that is, the last I knew about her, was that she was captured, that her captain and crew were all sent to prison, and that she was herself as much a prisoner as any of her former crew."

"And yet we see her now, directly in front of us, and bearing down upon us as if she meant business. Max, haven't you got any revolvers or guns aboard?"

"Why, yes; there are two or three, I imagine."

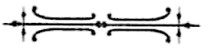
"I've got one," said the skipper. "The mate has another."

"And, Max, you have got two. Wait; I will get them."

She was gone in an instant, and presently she reappeared with a revolver in either hand. One of these she gave to her brother-in-law, retaining the other one herself.

The skipper, who had gone to possess himself of his own weapon, and also to call the mate to his side, reappeared at the same instant; and Kane's wife and her mother, having discovered that something out of the ordinary was happening, left their seats under the awning and added themselves to the group.

In the meantime the *Shadow* had drawn much nearer, and she had now changed her course so that she would lie directly



across the bow of the *Goalong*, a maneuver which Kane remembered as one which was a favorite with her commander. And now, too, the sharp crack of a rifled gun came to their ears from the deck of the

stranger, and a vaporlike smoke, which ascended from amidships, told them as plainly as words could have done that it proceeded from the turret, where they knew there had formerly been a machine gun located.

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Kane of her husband; but it was the skipper who replied.

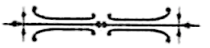
"It's the pirate, ma'am," he said. "It's the *Shadow*. Perhaps you'll remember her, for this isn't the first time we've been afoul of her. And that there gun from her amidships turret is an order for us to slow down and lay to. Now, Mr. Kane, what shall I do? Shall I obey it, or shall I go right along as if nothing had happened?"

Kane had entirely recovered his composure. He was thoroughly master of himself, now that he knew an emergency was at hand.

He turned coolly, and faced his skipper.

"You will keep going ahead at full speed, just as long as the wheel will turn," he said. "And, Mr. Manning, I wish you would call down to the engine and fire rooms and give orders to crowd her to the limit. If that fellow gets aboard of me he will have to do it on the fly, I can tell you that."

"It's more than likely that his next cartridge won't be a blank," said Manning.



"I don't care if it is loaded with dynamite; I won't stop now till I'm obliged to," was Kane's reply.

Then he turned to his wife, who was standing beside him.

"Cora," he said, "you and Bessie and your mother will have to go below. More than likely there will be bullets coming aboard of us before we are many minutes older, and I don't want you people here to get hit."

"Cora and mama can do as they like," said Bessie Harlan, replying as if Kane had addressed his remark to her, "but you don't catch me going below, Maxwell Kane.

"I'd much rather be up here where I can see things than to go down there and never know a thing about what is happening."

"But, Bess, you'll be— — There! Look there!"

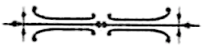
A half-dozen sharp reports, one following another with great rapidity, came from the deck of the *Shadow* at that instant, and at least three of the half-pound shot fired from the machine gun knocked splinters out of the woodwork forward, and one of them went through the wheel-house and clipped off one of the spokes as deftly as if it had been a ninepin.

"That looks like business, Mr. Kane," said Manning coolly.

"Yes," replied Max. "That chap means business. There is no doubt of that. Hello! What is he going to do now? Sheer off, do you think?"

"No; he's up to some new deviltry. Forward, there, at the wheel!" called the skipper.

"Aye, aye, sir."



"Lay her off two more points to port."

"Aye, aye, sir; off she goes."

"The pirate is coming about, now, Mr. Kane," said the skipper, then. "I think I can tell you what her game is now."

"Well, what is it?"

"Why, sir, that pirate fellow means to run up alongside of us. The *Shadow* is enough faster than we are for him to do that with ease, and with this smooth sea it will be like running a baby-farm. When he has done that, he'll either make fast to us and board us, or he'll riddle us with those half-pound shot at his leisure, sir."

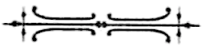
CHAPTER XIV.
THE ABDUCTION OF BESSIE HARLAN.

From the deck of the *Goalong*, Bessie Harlan watched the maneuvering of the pirate craft with an intensity which amounted almost to fascination.

It had not occurred to her thus far to feel personal fear. She remembered another occasion when she had met the pirate, and she recalled that she had been treated with the utmost consideration at that time, and now it did not occur to her that the rover of the sea would visit personal harm upon any of them.

She supposed that he intended merely to rob, and she did not know that, once having fired a gun from his deck, and thereby actually menacing another vessel on the high seas, he was just as amenable to capital punishment for his crime as if he had murdered the entire crew of the *Goalong* in cold blood.

Her ideas concerning his really harmless intention, so far as physical violence was concerned, seemed to be supported by



the fact that after those six shots, some of which had found their way aboard Kane's yacht, he did not again resort to his gun.

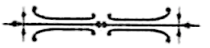
It was plain, however, that he had discovered that Kane did not mean to stop until he was compelled to do so; and that the rover had figured out a way to force him to stop his engines became more and more apparent as the moments passed.

It was a pretty sight, too, which Bessie Harlan and the others were watching. The long, low, narrow hull of the *Shadow*, funnelless, and with no deck housings of any kind save the sunbonnet-shaped turret forward, and the larger one amidships, from which the gun had been fired; and with the two masts, devoid of spars and sails, shining like silver and pointing like fingers into the air, had more the appearance of a living monster of the deep, to her eyes, than the look of a modern vessel.

The *Shadow* had been approaching the *Goalong* from a direction which was a few points off the starboard bow, but now she had altered her course so that it somewhat resembled the shape of an inverted interrogation point, and which, if pursued, would eventually swing her around so that she would come up in a parallel course with the yacht, and on the starboard side of her.

She would be running in the same direction, also, and as she was much fleeter than the *Goalong*, she would then have no difficulty in maintaining her position alongside and performing one of the acts which the skipper, Manning, had suggested—that is, either her men would board the yacht or they would pour in upon her the contents of that deadly machine gun.

And now, as the *Shadow* came about, a rod shot up from the interior of one of the steel masts, and from it there presently



floated out to the breeze a blood-red flag; and at the same moment, from the amidships turret, a figure came out on the convex, turtle-back deck and stood there with folded arms, facing the yacht.

There was no mark of any kind upon the red field of the flag, and it was not more red than the costume of the pirate himself, who seemed to have taken the pattern of his costume from the tragedy of "Hamlet."

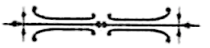
A mask of the same color as his costume covered his face, and his left hand rested upon the gold-mounted hilt of a rapier at his side. And he stood there, calmly watching the yacht, which, although it was struggling through the water at its utmost speed, might as well have stopped its engines and waited, for the *Shadow* was overhauling her as swiftly and as surely as a greyhound would have overtaken a terrier.

Closer and closer the pirate craft approached, until not more than a hundred feet separated the two vessels; and then her engines slowed down until the two were running along side by side, and so near together that conversation might easily be carried on from one deck to the other. It was then that Maxwell Kane slowly and deliberately raised the revolver he held in his hand, and was taking careful aim at the pirate chief, when the quiet voice of Bessie Harlan murmured in his ear:

"Don't shoot, Max. Wait." she said.

But instead of desisting, Kane pulled the trigger.

The explosion followed and the bullet was sped on its way; but if those on the deck of the yacht had expected to see the pirate pitch forward to his own deck, shot through the heart, they were disappointed. He did not move from the position he



had occupied ever since he made his appearance, save that he removed his plumed hat mockingly from his head and made a sweeping gesture with it toward the man who had fired. And then he called out to him.

"Don't do that again," he commanded coolly, "unless you wish me to riddle you with bullets, regardless of those who are standing beside you. Put down your weapon, Mr. Kane, and command all others there to do the same. Then order your engines stopped. If you do not, I will disable you."

"You had better obey him," said the skipper, in a low tone. "He means what he says. This is no child's play, Mr. Kane."

"I am beginning to realize that fact," replied Kane.

"Shall I give the order to stop her, sir?"

"Yes; there is no use in risking the lives of everybody aboard. The fellow is a pirate, all right."

"And he is also the Count of Cadillac," murmured Bessie. "I remember his voice."

"I have had no doubt of that from the first moment we discovered the *Shadow*," replied Kane, with a grimace.

The bell in the engine-room rang at that moment, and the engines of the *Goalong* were slowed down. Then another bell, and they stopped altogether; and, although there was no sound of a bell from the pirate craft, she kept pace with the yacht in coming to a stop, so that after a moment they were forging ahead, side by side, with only their natural momentum to give them steerage way.

And after a moment this was also lost, and the two vessels were rolling almost side by side on the gentle rise and fall of

the dead swell of the ocean. Then, as if by prearrangement, rather than as the result of an order just given, half a score of men suddenly appeared on the deck of the rover, beside their chief.

Either they knew exactly what they were expected to do, or their orders were already given them, for they took their places along the rail of the *Shadow* with the precision of automatons and waited.

A group of them went forward, another group aft, and a third remained almost amidships, near their chief. In the possession of each group there were two stout lines with grappling-irons attached to them, and Kane and his party, on the deck of the yacht, could see that the men stood ready to heave them when the proper moment should arrive.

It was then that Kane's skipper, Manning, shook his head doubtfully.

"The *Shadow* is a much heavier craft than we are, Mr. Kane," he said. "If they make fast to us with this dead swell a-running under us, and heaving our bows into the air with every rise, she'll swamp us in no time; but——"

He paused in his pessimistic prognostication, for at that moment the grappling-irons were thrown aboard. They caught, too, as if they had been cast by well-practised hands, and then, as the men of the *Shadow* made fast their own ends of the lines, power was given her and she forged ahead until, with the lines drawn taut, the two vessels were brought as safely side by side as if the act had been performed on the bosom of a mill-pond.

And from that moment, too, the wheel of the *Shadow* was kept moving, so that the yacht to which she had made fast was

towed slowly through the water, and in that way the bows of the two vessels were kept headed toward the swell with sufficient steerageway to keep them so.

"That pirate feller is a sailor, all right," muttered Manning. "I couldn't have done any better myself."

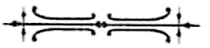
In the meantime, the slack of the lines had been taken up, and now they were lashed firmly into place, so that the *Shadow* and the *Goalong* were held together exactly as if they had been one vessel. All this time the pirate chief had retained his position near the turret, with his arms folded across his breast; but now he took a few steps aft, until he was directly abreast of the group on the deck of the yacht, and then he swept them another bow.

"Ladies," he said, ignoring Kane, "I have been lying on and off in the harbor of Hamilton for something more than a week in order, ultimately, to enjoy the pleasure of this moment. I regret that I cannot be assured that it is mutual."

"What the devil do you want, and what have you stopped us for on the high seas?" demanded Kane angrily.

The rover turned his eyes, which shone like sparks of fire through the holes in the mask which concealed his face toward Kane. Then he made a gesture which his men evidently understood, for in an instant more Kane discovered that three wicked-looking rifles were aimed at his breast, and that behind each one of them was a masked figure in red.

"Mr. Kane," said the pirate coolly, "you are not expected to speak at all, unless it is in reply to a question addressed to you. My men have orders to fire and to kill you if you do not obey. I



trust you will have sense enough to remain uninjured, since silence on your part is all that is necessary in order to do so."

Kane ground his teeth together in a rage; but he knew that the pirate had uttered no idle threat, and that it was useless to do other than to obey him.

"And shall I be shot, also, if I speak?" demanded Bessie boldly.

"You, Miss Harlan? I shoot you? Let me assure you that you are as safe from harm at this moment as if you were in the boudoir of your own home, surrounded by all your faithful attendants."

"Humph!" said Bessie. "That may be true, but it doesn't appear so. Are you not Count Cadillac?"

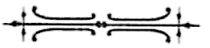
The pirate shrugged his shoulders, and they thought he laughed a little.

"Just now," he replied, "I call myself the modern Red Rover —but I do that merely for the want of a better title. Captain Sparkle, who formerly commanded this vessel, is, unfortunately for him, detained elsewhere, and I have assumed his place. Perhaps it is not too much for me to admit that I was only known to you as Count Cadillac. Does that fact reassure you, Miss Harlan?"

"On the contrary, it fills me with dread."

"Indeed! Why so?"

"Because I cannot understand how a man who possesses so many of the prerogatives of a gentleman as you do, can descend to such a vulgar calling as you have adopted."



The pirate shrugged his shoulders again.

"It may be," he said slowly, "that I will be able to make that plain to you—later."

Bessie tossed her head, and was on the point of turning away, when the voice of the pirate arrested her.

"Wait!" he said sternly. "Remain where you are, Miss Harlan."

She wheeled and faced him, with flaming cheeks and blazing eyes.

"Do you dare!" she began, and paused.

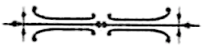
The pirate had made another gesture, which his men seemed to understand, and in obedience to it several of them stepped aboard the yacht, while the others drew up in line along the rail of the *Shadow* and leveled their rifles at the entire party, which included, as may now be readily understood, the crew of the yacht, as well as her owner and guests.

"Mrs. Harlan," said the pirate coldly, then, addressing the mother of the two young women, "you will oblige me if you will go to your cabin. Not a man of my crew shall touch you if you obey, but if you refuse you will be taken there. Thank you. That is the better way."

He turned then a little, and added:

"Now, Mrs. Kane, I will ask you to follow your mother. You, Mr. Kane, will follow the two ladies. No resistance, if you please, and no questions. Mr. Manning, follow your master."

The pirate chief watched the four persons until they disappeared inside the cabin, and then with a bound he leaped



aboard the yacht and paused within three paces of where Bessie Harlan stood. She was turning away to follow in the footsteps of her mother and sister when the pirate suddenly appeared in front of her, barring her way.

"Your way lies yonder, Miss Harlan," he said quietly, pointing with one hand toward the deck of his own vessel.

Bessie started back in terror, and then she would have darted past him, and so sought to escape; but, with a quick bound, he was beside her, and in another instant she was lifted from her feet and carried, bodily, aboard the *Shadow*.

CHAPTER XV.
NICK CARTER IS THE MAN.

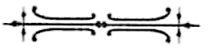
If you scream or call the others to your assistance," she heard the pirate say into her ear, as he leaped from one vessel to the other with her in his arms, "you will only succeed in having them shot, so be silent."

So she did not scream. Even in that instant of horror, when she felt that the pirate was stealing her away for some terrible fate, she knew not what, she possessed the courage to remain silent, and so, as she believed, to save her sister and the others who were with her from instant death.

A hoarse murmur went up from the crew of the yacht when they witnessed this high-handed proceeding on the part of the pirate, for they loved Bessie Harlan. But they were powerless to help her then; and besides, the rifles of the pirate crew were aimed at their hearts. There was nothing that they could do save to stand quietly by and witness the abduction of Bessie Harlan.

Again the men of the *Shadow* worked as if every act of their master's had been foreseen before they boarded the yacht.

As they left the deck of the *Goalong* they also cast loose the grapplings, and even as the last one stepped upon the deck of the pirate cruiser, the chief, with Bessie in his arms, disappeared through the turret into the hold of the vessel, and as if that were a signal to the engineer, the *Shadow* at the same



instant shot ahead like a thing of life, starting away at almost full speed. And so swiftly did she move that, in the gathering gloom—and it was now almost dark—she soon disappeared entirely from view.

For a moment after her departure the crew of the *Goalong* to a man remained where they were standing, as if the unheard-of proceeding of which they had just been witnesses had paralyzed their energies.

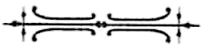
Then in a body they rushed aft toward the cabin.

But the practised ear and the trained intelligence of the skipper had already told him that the pirate vessel had taken her departure, and he was on the point of coming out on the deck, followed by Kane and his companions, when the crew called to him. At first the reality of the horror that had actually occurred did not impress itself upon any of them. Not one of them realized the truth of what was told to them—that is, that Bessie had actually been taken away.

But when Mrs. Harlan, the mother, did realize that her younger daughter was gone indeed, and was now at the mercy of the pirate chief, she promptly fainted.

Kane, himself, turned white and cold. In all his conjectures concerning the pirate—and he had had many while he was a prisoner below in his own cabin—he had never once thought of this.

True, he had wondered for a moment that Bessie was not sent to the cabin with them, but he really did not give the matter any particular thought; he had certainly not dreamed of such an answer to the question as the one he now received.



His wife did not faint. She reeled against the bulkhead, white and haggard, and with her face all pinched into lines of terror, which rendered her almost unrecognizable; and for a time she could only moan her sorrow.

"Poor Bessie!" she murmured. "Poor Bessie! Rather had we all been murdered in cold blood by that pirate fiend than that this should have happened."

Presently she started, for a hand had fallen on her shoulder. The maids had come on deck and taken charge of her mother, and in her agony she had utterly forgotten her husband.

"You, Max?" she asked, without turning.

"Yes."

"It is awful!" she murmured, with a shudder. "What shall we do, dear?"

"Bessie had my revolver in her hand," said Max, irrelevantly.

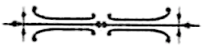
"God grant that she will have the courage to use it!" moaned her sister.

"She will, Cora, against him or—herself, if it comes to that."

Mrs. Kane shivered. Then she flung her arms around her husband's neck and sobbed as if her heart would indeed break; but after awhile she became quieter, and presently she repeated her former question.

"What shall we do, Max?" she asked.

"I don't know," he replied vaguely.



"There is Nick Carter," she sobbed. "You know how quickly he accomplished something before."

"Yes; of course, I shall go to him at once. That goes without saying, Cora. But how will even Carter be able to pursue and catch this brute of a pirate? We have no trace of him. He leaves no track behind him on the pathless ocean. Even now he is far out of sight, and we have no idea in which direction he has gone. And besides, Cora, if we do the very best we can we cannot hope to arrive in New York in less than forty-eight hours from now. Two whole days, that is; and probably that damned vil—pardon me, dear—probably that infernal scoundrel is going faster than we are, in the opposite direction. You see, don't you, Cora, that if we knew exactly where to find the pirate we could not hope to overtake him in much less than two weeks, could we?"

"Do you mean, Max, that we cannot—cannot hope to—to save Bessie?" sobbed his wife.

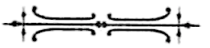
"I mean this, Cora—and we might as well look the matter squarely in the face, now that it has confronted us, don't you think so?"

"Well? Go on, Max."

"What I was going to say was this: Bessie has got a lot of sand and pluck. You know that."

"Yes."

"Well, if anybody saves Bess it will be Bess herself who accomplishes it, and it wouldn't surprise me a bit if she should find a way to do it. There is one thing dead sure, and that is that we can't do anything—not a blessed thing—now. We've got to wait till we can get the right sort of a start. We can't hope to



overtake Bess, and be on hand to do her any sort of good, inside of two or three weeks, and it may be as many months. The Atlantic Ocean is a whopping big place, and there are several other oceans to take into account, too; and so, here is the face of the thing, as I wanted you to look at it a moment ago: If Bessie is not in immediate danger, she is just about as safe three months from now as she would be three days from now. If that pirate means any devil's work, he'll get about it before he is very much older; and if it happens that there is enough of the gentleman left in him to make him keep his hands off and respect her, why, then no actual harm will come to her. Don't you see that?"

"Yes, and it makes me hope. Because I do think——"

"What?"

"I think that perhaps the count is still a gentleman, outwardly, at least; don't you?"

"No, I don't. But I do think he is in love with Bess. And if he is, that is the only one thing in the world that will save her."

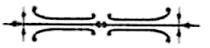
"Why, Max, that very fact—if it is a fact——"

"There, there, now! That very fact is what I'm talking about. If he is really in love with Bess, she'll be as safe from harm when we find her as if she had been aboard the *Goalong* all the time."

"But, Max! Have you thought——"

"Thought what?"

"Of the name of it."



"Oh, confound the name of it. It's the game, and not the name, with which we are concerned just now. Bess has got a gun; don't forget that—and she knows how to use it, too. And Cadillac is in love with her, up to his ears, if I am any judge of human nature. When he was our guest it was as plain as the nose on your face."

"Yes; I thought so, too."

"Well, as I said a minute ago, Bess knows how to use a gun all right, but if there is one thing which she knows how to make use of better than any other, it is a man who is in love with her. She can twist one of 'em around her fingers like straws, and I'll bet a million that she'll be doing the act for the modern red rover, as he calls himself, before he's had her a prisoner an hour. She'll be boss of the whole shooting match before she has been a day aboard the *Shadow*."

"Perhaps she is dead, even now, while we are talking about her," said Cora, shuddering.

"She is either in no immediate danger, or somebody is dead; you can bet on that, girl!"

"If only she did not faint away," murmured Kane's wife; and he looked at her strangely for a moment and then shrugged his shoulders as he replied:

"Bess isn't one of the fainting kind, Cora. And now, don't you think you had better go to your mother?"

"Yes, dear, but what shall I tell her?"

"Tell her! There isn't anything to tell her, is there? Tell her what we have been talking about. Tell her every idea that has occurred to us about the matter. Tell her that we are legging it

back for New York and Nick Carter just as fast as this blessed old tub will carry us.

Tell her that when we get there I'll pull down stars out of the sky and dig up mountains with my two hands to save Bess. Tell her—she already knows it, but you can remind her of it, just the same—tell her that your chump husband is worth a number of millions of dollars, and that he'll spend every last dollar he's got to find Bess and save her, and to hunt down the fellow that stole her, no matter what has happened; and tell her if she can think of anything else that she would like done, it shall be done if there are men in the world to do it. And tell her not to cry. Crying won't help the matter any, and it interferes with good, clear eyesight. I'd like to swear, but swearing doesn't assist the judgment any, as I have discovered, so you see I don't do it. Brace up, Cora, girl! Bite on the bullet. It hurts, I know. It hurts me just as much as it does you. But let me tell you this much before we part—and it means a good deal, too."

"What, Max?"

"Nick Carter thinks a lot of Bessie, if anybody should ask you. He won't require any seven-league boots behind him to spur him on in this matter; and if there is a man on top of earth who can figure this thing out about the way it really is, that man is Nick Carter. He will see through it like a glass, and blow me if I don't somehow feel as if he would know at once just about where to look for Bessie and the pirate."

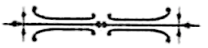
CHAPTER XVI.
THE PIRATE'S BEAUTIFUL CAPTIVE.

And now we must return for a space to the pirate cruiser, the *Shadow*. Although Bessie Harlan did not faint when the pirate chief seized her and bore her aboard of his own craft, from the deck of the yacht, she was in reality so near to doing so that she was rendered as helpless as a babe in the arms of the man who carried her.

She was conscious only that she was borne from the deck of one vessel to the other, and that then her abductor carried her down a short flight of steps into the interior of the boat. She heard him open a door, and she was conscious then that she was in a lighted room, although she could not have opened her eyes to save her life, it seemed to her.

They traversed this room, or cabin—she did not see what it was—and presently passed through a second door. Inside this second apartment the air was cool and sweet. She could hear the bur-r-r of an electric fan and could feel the draft it created.

But still she did not open her eyes. Then she realized that her captor was putting her down, and he did it so quietly and so tenderly that she decided he must believe that she had fainted, and, in order not to undeceive him, she kept her eyes closed.



Her only thought now was to escape from his arms—to liberate herself from his immediate grasp—to get away from him, from his touch; to be out of his reach.

For she still held Max Kane's revolver in her grasp, and she closed her fingers even more tightly around the butt of it, in order that it might not drop out of her reach, and she pushed it even farther among the folds of her dress in order that he might not by any possibility discover that she had it.

And then he put her down. She felt that she was resting upon an upholstered chair, and that the pirate was bending over her, studying her features.

She permitted herself to breathe a little—just enough to reassure him so that he would not resort to extreme measures to bring her back to consciousness. She only hoped that he would go away and leave her until she could have time to recover her senses fully—until she might think over the awful thing that had happened, and decide what to do.

She even thought calmly about the expedient of putting a bullet through her own heart the moment the pirate should leave her alone, and she regarded the idea quite calmly, as something which was not at all impracticable. He touched her hands with the tips of his own fingers, having drawn off his gauntleted gloves in order to do so. Then he touched her brow in the same manner, and she shuddered almost, lest he should use his lips.

But, if he thought of it, he did not attempt to do it.

She heard him sigh. Then she knew that he had straightened up and drawn away from her. It seemed to her that he stood

there a long time, watching her, before he made a move to go away; but at last he did so.

Her sense of hearing was so acute that she could almost hear him as he breathed. She knew when he began to move away from her, and she could feel the increasing distance between them, as he went nearer to the door by which they had entered.

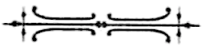
Then she heard the clicking of the latch, and she permitted the lids of her eyes to rise ever so little—just enough so that she could see through her drooping lashes the figure of the pirate chieftain standing on the threshold.

The mask still covered his face; evidently he had forgotten it. He was looking back upon her with an expression she could not fathom, for the reason that she could not see through the mask; but his attitude was kindly, if one can see kindness in the mere figure of a person.

Then he went out and closed the door softly behind him. For one, two, three, four, five seconds of time Bessie did not move. She counted them in order that she might make no mistake; and she waited that length of time lest the man might repent of his hasty departure and decide to return.

Then, at the end of the five seconds, she raised the revolver from under the folds of her dress and leveled it at the closed door.

She maintained that position while she counted ten more, and if the rover had opened the door during that time she would have shot him. She did not know that, when arrayed in the costume he was then wearing, he wore a steel breastplate under his shirt which would have



turned her bullet just as it turned Kane's, earlier in the evening.

But now fifteen seconds had elapsed since the pirate left her. A full quarter of a minute, and she leaped to her feet and darted toward the door. There was no ordinary lock upon it, but there was a chain-bolt, and this she at once slipped into place.

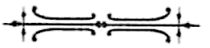
That done, she breathed a sigh of relief; and then, with an added shiver, she looked hastily around to discover if there were other means of entrance to the palatial cabin in which she was now a prisoner.

Farther aft there were portières over a doorway, and she hurried to it, but only to discover that it was the means of communication with a passage from which four staterooms opened.

There was no other way out of the cabin save through the door used by the pirate; Bessie convinced herself of that at once, and with untold relief. Then she peered into the staterooms, one after another, and she discovered with alarm that one of them was all too plainly the abode of the corsair.

And then, when she would have made further investigation, she heard the rattle of the chain on the door she had fastened, and she tiptoed her way across the cabin until she stood almost against it, listening. The pirate had returned. She knew he was there, although, from the position she occupied almost behind the door, she could not see him. After a moment, during which she knew that he turned and gave a low-toned order to some person who was standing near him, he called her by name.

"Miss Harlan!" he said. "Miss Harlan!"



She did not reply. He repeated the summons, somewhat louder than before, but she made no answer.

"Won't you open the door?" he requested. "At least let me know that you hear me, or I will be obliged to break it down in order to assure myself that you are uninjured."

"Yes, I hear you," she said, then, realizing how simple a matter it would be for him to burst the door open.

"Will you not open the door?" he asked her again.

"No," she replied.

"If I assure you that you will be as free from harm as if you were aboard your brother's yacht?"

"No."

"But I wish to talk with you, and this is not a pleasant attitude for conversation."

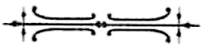
She made no reply to this.

"Will you open the door?" he asked again.

"No," she said. "I will not open the door."

It was stretched, of course, to the utmost limit of the chain, which permitted an aperture of two or three inches.

She still stood behind it, out of his sight, and with the revolver tightly grasped in her right hand; but now, fearing that he might decide to break the door from its fastenings, she drew back one step more, farther into the corner. Then she saw something, she did not know what, pass through the opening between the door and the casing and touch against the chain.



That something was a pair of steel nippers, although she did not know it; and she was dismayed the next moment to see the chain fall loosely away from the catch, and to see that the door was swinging open. With one bound she reached the table in the center of the cabin, and with another she passed around it so that it was between her and the door. Then she raised the revolver and pointed it at the pirate.

He came through the doorway and closed it behind him, and then he stood there with his back against it, smiling upon her almost as if he were amused.

"If you make an effort to approach me or to touch me," she said, and her voice was clear and strong, belying the awful terror that was wringing her heart, "if you come as much as two steps nearer to me than you are now, I will shoot you!"

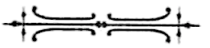
For a moment he permitted his eyes to dwell upon her face, quizzically, without deigning a reply; it seemed to her that he was weighing what she had said to him, as, indeed, he was doing, though not in the manner she thought.

After a moment he shrugged his shoulders a little and laughed softly.

"Very well," he said, "shoot me. I assure you that I should not greatly care if you did so."

She made no reply, and presently he added:

"However, for your own sake, I should advise you not to do so. You see, Miss Harlan, it would greatly add to your present danger if I were to die. I do not express that with exact correctness, for, as a matter of fact, you are now in no danger at all, while if I were to die you might be in considerable."



"I will not pretend to understand you," she said scornfully.

"No? Suppose I make myself more explicit?"

"As you please," she retorted.

"Must I remain here until I do so?"

"I have already told you that if you attempt to come nearer I will kill you. I did not deceive you when I said that."

Again he shrugged his shoulders, and the ghost of a smile played around his handsome features, for, as the reader has guessed, he no longer wore the mask, nor the hat, nor the wig which went with it. Otherwise he was still in the costume of the corsair.

"Very good," he said. "Perhaps you will be more lenient when I have explained."

"If you can explain," she replied coldly.

"Oh, yes, I can explain, Miss Harlan. There are always explanations for things, you know."

Her reply was a haughty stare. She did not offer him so much as a gesture by way of encouragement.

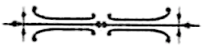
"Has it occurred to you to attempt to explain to yourself why I dared to bring you to this vessel, and into this cabin, by force, and utterly against your will?" he asked.

"No."

"Shall I tell you?"

"If you will tell me the truth about it—yes."

"I shall tell you nothing but the truth, Miss Harlan."



Her lips curled with scorn, but she made no reply.

"Do you recall something that I said to you once, on the deck of Mr. Kane's yacht?"

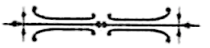
"You have said a great many things to me there, Count Cadillac, if that be your own name, which I doubt." There was a little frightened catch in her voice, which she strove to conceal by forcing herself to be insolent; but he heard it, and he knew that he had startled her.

"Miss Harlan," he said rapidly, "this conversation is only the beginning of a very great deal that I have to say to you, and it is my duty to inform you, with all the emphasis at my command, before I attempt to say another word, that as long as you honor this vessel with your presence, with or against your own free will, you shall be treated in every way as an honored guest upon it. There will be no word or act said or done in your presence which can in any way offend your tenderest sensibilities. May I beg that you will believe me?"

There was so much sincerity in his voice that she believed him in spite of herself, and for a moment the conviction that she was free from the nameless horror of her position, which had already almost driven her mad, overcame her.

"Then why, why, why did you bring me here at all?" she cried.

She had forgotten the weapon she held in her hand, in that instant, and the muzzle drooped until it touched the table unheeded. It would have been an easy matter for him then, had he wished to do so, to have stepped forward and possessed himself of the weapon before she could have recovered it; but he did not move.



"Your question brings us back again to the one I just asked," he said. "Shall I repeat it?"

If she heard him she did not heed, for she made no reply.

"Do you remember—don't you remember that particular something I said to you at the time I refer to, when we were together as guests on Mr. Kane's yacht?"

"You said very many things to me, Count Cadillac. I do not recall anything——"

"I told you that I loved you, Miss Harlan. I asked you to be my wife; and you did not entirely refuse me."

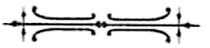
She raised her head now, and her eyes were blazing with wrath—righteous wrath, so intense that it made her forget their relative positions.

"You dare to repeat that to me, now, after—after all that has happened since that time?" she demanded.

"Miss Harlan," he said calmly, deliberately, but not unkindly, "I have brought you here by force, if you will, in order that I might say it—in order that I might continue saying it, over and over again, day after day. I am an outlaw now. I know it; but I am still a gentleman. I——"

"A gentleman, indeed!" she interrupted him. "Thank God that word has a different meaning in America than it does where you were born. A gentleman! Say rather an impostor, a swindler, a bogus count, a thief!"

The man winced as if he had received a blow, and his face went deadly white, like the waxen face of a corpse.



For a moment even his lips seemed bloodless, and his fingers clinched into the palms of his hands until the manicured nails drew blood where he dug them into his flesh.

But he made no other motion.

He stood like a statue before her. He seemed scarcely to breathe; and for more than a full minute he did not speak.

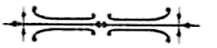
"I have expected something very like that from you," he said, at last, in a voice in which the effort to remain calm was plainly apparent. "In a measure I have schooled myself to hear it; but I did not know how hard it would be—how terrible it would sound from your lips. If I had known that, I almost doubt if I would have brought you here at all, Miss Harlan.

"At least I am not an impostor," he resumed, after another pause. "I am the Count of Cadillac, whatever else I may happen to be. My family is among the oldest of Anjou. My ancestors count back into the Dark Ages almost, among the oldest, the best, the bravest, and the most honorable.

"Nor am I a swindler, Miss Harlan. I do not think you thought that, even when you said it.

"Nor am I a thief. Save your own person, I have never stolen a thing in my life.

"However, I do not expect you to believe all this, at least just at present. I did not suppose that you would do so when I brought you here, but it was in the hope that time would give me an opportunity to convince you of its truth, that I decided on this lawless act.



"Wait; I have not done, nor will I be done, ever, until you consent to listen to me with at least an outward show of interest.

"And I prefer to begin with you frankly. That is why I began this conversation by admitting to you that I have stolen you from your friends, and brought you here by force, because I love you; and because I have a hope, away down in my heart, that I will end by winning your consent to be my wife."

Bessie had permitted her revolver to rest with the muzzle against the table ever since it had dropped there some time before; but now she raised it. He watched her silently, wondering if she intended to use it upon him; and, if the truth be told, caring very little if she did so. But she held it daintily in her hand; and then, with her eyes fixed searchingly upon his face, she said slowly:

"Do you see this pistol? Rather than become your wife, and rather than live to be forced to confess to my sister and my friends the insults to which you have subjected me, Count Cadillac, I would a thousand times turn it upon myself—so!"

CHAPTER XVII.
THE TIME AND THE HOUR!

The pirate chieftain—or, as we will call him for the present, Count Cadillac—had not the slightest idea of Bessie's intention until she had succeeded in turning the weapon upon herself, and the muzzle of it was already against her temple.

If the revolver had been an ordinary one, or if the muscles of Bessie Harlan's fingers had been firmer and stronger, she must have taken her own life then and there, before her companion could have done aught to prevent it. But the weapon was of the double-action pattern; more than that, the action was firm and strong, so that it required a considerable exertion of the muscles of the fingers to work it.

Then again, the position in which she was obliged to hold it strained the muscles of the right hand in such a position that the feat of pulling the trigger sufficiently to raise the hammer past the catch was twice difficult. Double-action revolvers are not the best in the world for the uses of people with suicidal intent.

As has already been said, the muzzle of the weapon was already against her temple, before the count fully realized her intent; but then he leaped forward with a sudden cry. Perhaps his sudden action, together with the cry he uttered, had

something to do with disconcerting her; at all events, he was in time.

It is doubtful, too, if she realized what she was about to do.

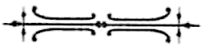
A creature of impulses always, the count's words of love spoken at such a time, and bringing to mind, as they did, that the time was not far distant in the past when she had consented to listen to him, and when she had not repulsed him—when even she had secretly convinced herself that she might some day love this man—filled her with such horror of her present position that death seemed to be the only way of escape.

It is certain that she intended to kill herself. It is certain that she intended to send the bullet through her brain and thus to escape at once and for all time the horror of her present surroundings. It is also certain that the sudden activity of the count prevented her from carrying her impulse to a fatal termination.

It will be remembered that the table was between them; that she stood facing him at one side of it, while he was half-way across the cabin from her, at the opposite side. But his leap toward her was like the spring of a panther, and the cry he uttered was so filled with horror, amazement, terror, and remorse for bringing her to such a pass, that it startled even her, wrapped up as she was in her fatal resolve.

As he leaped forward he threw himself bodily across the table, scattering the books and papers, and the electric drop-light that stood in the center of it, in every direction, and upon every side.

And he managed, somehow, to reach her arm and hand. He managed, somehow, to seize the wrist of the hand which held



the weapon—to deflect it, and to knock it from her grasp with such force that it was sent hurling across the room, where it fell, clattering, against the mahogany bulkhead. It was not even discharged.

The hammer, which her tender muscles had been unable to raise, fell again into place without touching the cartridge in the chamber, and Bessie stood for an instant, abashed, before him.

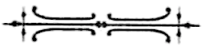
The table was still between them. He remained, leaning upon it with both hands, and with his face thrust forward toward her, speechless with dismay, alarm, and with thanksgiving for his power to prevent the consummation of her terrible act.

And she stood opposite him, a few feet away, white and staring—herself speechless from the terror of the thing which had approached her so closely, and yet had passed her by.

For a moment it was a tableau which neither of them comprehended; and then the count did the only thing he could have done under the circumstances, to help her to regain her composure, and to convince her that she was not in the terrible danger she dreaded from his presence.

He straightened himself back upon his feet, calmly and slowly, until he stood upright before her. Then he folded his arms across his chest, and looked into her eyes silently. Presently he pointed with one finger toward the weapon where it was lying against the bulkhead, and he said slowly:

"Yonder is your weapon, Miss Harlan. Let me suggest that you resume possession of it, in order that you may still have the means about you to protect yourself against a danger which exists only in your imagination."



She did not move, and after a moment he continued:

"I have assured you that you are safe here—as safe as any honored guest might be anywhere in the world. While we are aboard this vessel together, while you are a passenger upon it, I should like to have free access to this cabin—in short, I should be glad if you will consider it a common meeting-place between us. But yonder"—he pointed toward the portières which divided the cabin from the passageway—"yonder, beyond those curtains, is a portion of the *Shadow* which you may regard as your personal domain. Beyond that point no human being save yourself shall penetrate, so long as you are my guest.

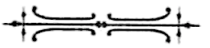
"And there," he continued, "you will find every convenience, and every article of wearing-apparel, which you can require. The clothing belonged to Madame Cadillac, the wife of my brother, as good and true and splendid a woman as ever drew breath. You know something about her, for you have heard Nick Carter talk about her; you have heard the husband of your sister describe her.

"You are the only woman aboard this vessel, but that need make no difference. You have but to touch the button yonder to secure the services of the steward, who will serve you, at any time, with anything you require, which he possesses.

"And now, Miss Harlan, I will bid you good night. Until some time to-morrow, at least, you will not be again intruded upon."

He turned swiftly and would have disappeared through the door had she not held up one hand in a gesture to detain him.

"Wait," she said simply.



"Yes?" he said, in reply.

"You have convinced me," she said, "that you intend me no immediate personal harm."

He bowed his head, without replying in words.

"And I doubt," she continued, "if you realize the incalculable and terrible injury you inflict upon me with every additional moment I pass aboard this vessel."

"I have taken that into consideration," he replied calmly. "I know how you view it. It is too late now, however, to remedy it. If it were not too late, I would set you back aboard the *Goalong*. As it is— —"

"As it is," she interrupted, "permit me to doubt your word in that respect, Count Cadillac."

Again he bowed without replying.

"I wish you to tell me where you are taking me," she said.

"To Anjou," he replied laconically.

"To your château in France?"

"Yes."

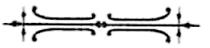
"For what purpose?"

"To make you my wife, when we arrive there, if in the meantime I am permitted to win your consent."

"You are at least frank."

"Yes."

"And if you do not succeed in winning my consent—whatdisposition do you intend to make of me in that case?"



"I intend to return you to your friends."

"Indeed! Would it not have been better to have left me with my friends? Do you think it possible to win my regard under such monstrous circumstances as those with which you have surrounded me?"

"I think I shall at least succeed in winning your respect."

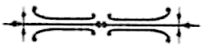
"What! Win my respect, when you have stolen from me all the respect and esteem with which I have ever been regarded by the friends from whom you have stolen me?"

"Miss Harlan, you are as safe here as——"

"Stop, sir! You are, perhaps, positive of the truth of that statement, and I will admit that you have partially convinced me of it; but are you so ingenuous, so unsophisticated in regard to worldly matters, as to suppose for a moment that others will regard my present plight in that manner? It would have been better, much better for me, Count Cadillac, had you murdered me in cold blood before you brought me here as you have done. It would have been better for you had you permitted me to make use of that weapon which I just now turned upon myself, to end my life, and afterward used it for the same purpose upon yourself; and it would have been much better for both of us had you met the fate of your brother, who is now a convict.

"Wait, sir, I have not done. I will finish what I have to say, and then I will thank you if you will leave me to myself.

"I shall not take my own life now, Count Cadillac; I shall live. Back yonder in New York there is a man toward whom my brother is now speeding, with all the power the engines of his yacht contain. You know to whom I refer."



"Nick Carter!"

"Aye, Nick Carter. Do you remember him, Count Cadillac? Do you doubt that he will search for me and find me? Do you doubt that he will also search for you and find you? And do you doubt, for one moment, what will happen to you when he does find you?

"Ah! sir, it does not matter now, in your case, how soon you set me at liberty—you have committed this act of wrong against me, and Nick Carter will hunt you down for it as surely as you stand there now. He will find you, if you are in France, in Anjou, in Patagonia, or at the north pole. He will find you, and he will hold you to strict account for your work this night. Be assured of that much!

"And I have said that I will not again attempt my own life. I will not. I will live and wait—live and hope for the coming of that hour when you will find yourself face to face with him—face to face with Nick Carter. And now, sir, good night. I have no doubt that you will enjoy pleasant dreams."

CHAPTER XVIII.
THE DETECTIVE SIZES UP THE CASE.

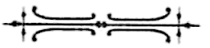
When the *Goalong* passed the Narrows and was making her way rapidly through the upper harbor, it was approaching the evening of the second day after her encounter with the pirate cruiser, *Shadow*.

Maxwell Kane was standing near the wheel-house as they passed inside the bay, and, after glancing at his watch, he turned and walked aft, where his wife and her mother were seated, silent, under the awning. Both were sad and care-worn, for the terrible uncertainty as to the fate of the beloved sister and daughter had almost prostrated them. And yet, they had borne up wonderfully well under the circumstances.

"I am always good at picking winners," Kane had said to them on one occasion, "and I will take Bess against the field any time. That pirate will get left at the pole, you see if he doesn't, and he'll never come within a thousand yards of our filly. You see!"

Just now, when he walked aft, he had another idea on his mind.

"Mother," he said, to the elder woman, "we will be at the foot of West Twenty-third Street in something more than an hour; that is to say, in exactly forty-eight hours since we parted with the *Shadow*."



"Yes, Maxwell," she replied. "Well?"

"I was about to suggest this: An hour more or less now won't cut much ice in this affair we've got on hand, will it?"

"I don't know exactly what you mean, Maxwell; but go on."

"I want you and Cora to remain on board when we land; see?"

"You don't wish us to go ashore? Really, Maxwell, I feel as if I must——"

"I don't want you to go ashore—either of you—until after we have seen and talked with Nick Carter. Just the very first moment when I can leave the yacht I will do so, and I will get him over the telephone and ask him to come to us; and we won't any of us say a blessed word about anything that has happened on this cruise, until after we have seen and talked with him. Is that agreeable?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so."

"I have given orders to Manning to that effect. And now, with that understanding, I'll have myself put ashore the first moment possible. In the meantime, if anybody should happen to come out to the yacht, you will not receive them?"

"Certainly not."

"It is not at all likely that anybody will do so, you know; but I wish to have it understood."

"Very well, Maxwell."

True to Kane's prophecy, the *Goalong* arrived at the time he said she would, and in a very short time after that he was in

communication with the detective. Their conversation was short, but very much to the point.

"Is that you, Nick?" Kane asked; and when he had received an affirmative reply he continued:

"Don't ask me for particulars over the phone, but come down here as quickly as you can, will you? It is a matter of life and death, old man."

"I'll be there at once," was the reply; and Kane heard the click of the receiver as the detective replaced it at the other end.

And he had not long to wait after that.

He did not return at once to the yacht, but lingered where he was until he saw the detective leap from a car and approach him; then he led the way directly to his launch, and the two were speedily set aboard the yacht. In as few words as possible, he then related the story of their adventure which had ended so disastrously—in the abduction of Bessie Harlan.

The very first question which Nick then asked was one which Kane had foreseen. It was:

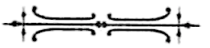
"Who, besides yourselves, is aware of this affair?"

"Not a soul in the world, save the people aboard this yacht—and aboard the pirate, of course."

"Then," said Nick slowly and emphatically, "not a soul save yourselves must ever know about it."

"Just my own idea," said Kane.

"It is for her sake," continued Nick Carter. "Ladies, when you go ashore, you must say not a thing about this sad occurrence. Give out—if you must make any explanation at all



—that Miss Harlan has remained at Bermuda, or that you have dropped her somewhere on the route homeward. For her own sake her present predicament must never be known."

"We realize that fully," said Mrs. Kane.

"Can you keep your crew from talking about the pirate?" asked Nick, of Max.

"You bet I can."

"Then see that you do so."

"But Mr. Carter," asked the mother, "can you not give us some hope of her rescue?"

"Hope? Certainly I can. Hope? There is no occasion for anything else save hope."

"But think—think of her awful predicament."

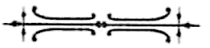
"I have thought of it. I am thinking of it now. Madam, you have often heard the expression that you cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear; but has it ever occurred to you that it is quite as difficult an undertaking to make a sow's ear out of a silk purse?"

"I do not understand you. Mr. Carter."

"Then I will explain. We are agreed, are we not, that the captain of the *Shadow* is no other and no less a person than Count Cadillac?"

"Yes."

"Very well. If Count Cadillac had been reared a pirate—if he had passed all his life before he appeared here in society among us, in the slums of the world, a scoundrel, a thief, an impostor,



and a felon, his advent here would have been a parallel with making a silk purse out of a sow's ear. Now, we all know that while he was among us, he at least appeared the gentleman, and, therefore, we are satisfied that his antecedents were and are good."

"That is certainly true, Nick," said Kane. "I begin to see the point you are getting at."

"Very well. Now, on the other hand, if he has always been a gentleman until he took up this calling of a pirate, he has undertaken the proposition of turning the saying the other way 'round; eh?"

"Changing himself into a sow's ear, when he has, heretofore, been a sort of a silk purse; is that the idea?"

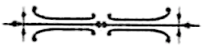
"Exactly."

"How does it apply, Mr. Carter?"

"Why, his natural proclivities are those of a gentleman. His calling as a pirate is an avocation rather than a vocation. He can play the brute, but he cannot wholly become one."

"He is certainly acting the part of one now," said Mrs. Kane.

"Granted; but it is only outwardly. Inherently, he is still a man of genteel tendencies. He has held you up in the middle of the ocean and robbed you of the greatest treasure you possess, but he has not done it for ransom—he has done it because he is in love with Bessie, and because he realized the utter hopelessness of his love, since we sent his brother to prison, and proved to our own satisfaction that he was as deep in the mud as his brother was in the mire.



"Don't you understand that the moment Bessie became a prisoner aboard his craft he realized her entire helplessness?

Don't you see that he never realized the enormity of the outrage he was committing, until he saw her seated there in his cabin, absolutely at his mercy? Can't I make you understand that, bad as he is, all the good there is in him rose to the surface at that moment, and every chivalric strain there is in him, descended from his ancestors, appealed to him then and there to protect her?"

"The point is," said Kane, "that he started in to make a sow's ear out of himself, and has had an opportunity to find out that it can't be done; eh?"

"Precisely. There are some things which cannot be accomplished by a man, no matter how intent he may be upon it; and the greatest of them all is, that he cannot change his nature. The genteel blood which flows in the veins of Count Cadillac would no more permit him to offer offense to Bessie Harlan, unprotected as she is, than it would you or me, Kane."

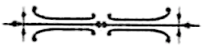
"By Jove, Carter! I believe you!"

"Certainly; so, you see, we must start in with the assurance that she is as safe from actual harm where she is as if she were here with us now."

The mother sighed.

"I wish I could feel it so," she said.

"It is as true, madam, as that you are seated there. Her position is, of course, a false one. She is in a terrible situation. But it is neither fatal nor vital. Have I convinced you, Mrs. Harlan?"



"You have more than half-done so, sir."

"Then let us proceed. We must now arrive at the quickest and best way of rescuing her; and we must agree that when she is at last rescued—as she will be in short order—the secret of her adventure must remain with us—with only those who are concerned in it—forever."

"By thunder! Carter, you are getting at the meat of the thing in short order. I knew that you would do it. I couldn't think of a method to cheer these women, try as I might, and here you have accomplished it in a moment."

"We must now get about the rescue," said Nick, again.

"But how? How shall we get about it? You can't trace that infernal craft of his across the waters of the ocean!"

"Why not?"

"Eh? Why not? Can you?"

"Certainly you can; or, at least, certainly we can."

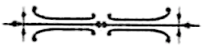
"For Heaven's sake, how?"

"Do you recall, Kane, the night when we swam aboard the *Shadow*?" asked Nick, referring to the time of the first capture of the pirate cruiser, when the brother of the count had been taken prisoner and sent to his just deserts.

"I should say I do."

"Do you remember the conversation I overheard between the count's brother—Captain Sparkle—and his wife?"

"Yes. Of course."



"Don't you recall the fact that at that time we learned the whole secret of their piratical proclivities? Don't you remember how the woman hated it all, and hated her husband, also, because he had ever gone into the venture?"

"Yes."

"And his explanation to her of his reasons, doubtless given to her for the hundredth or thousandth time?"

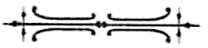
"Yes; certainly."

"Let me recall it to you, nevertheless. Over in his own country they are descendants of one of the oldest families of the oldest province of France—Anjou. There he possesses large estates, a château, and all that the heart of a Frenchman desires, save the one necessity, money. He became a pirate in order to possess himself of that necessary money. He had decided that there were hundreds of rich men in this country from whom he could purloin certain large sums which would mean a fortune to him, but which would not affect them, even after they had been robbed. His idea was that they were so rich that they would never miss at all what he took from them."

"Yes; I remember all that."

"His only idea in becoming a pirate was to restore his fallen fortunes; to redeem his estates; to rebuild his château; to become a grandee, as his ancestors had been for many generations before him; to settle down there at last, in quiet and in happiness, rich, admired, respected, and esteemed. And he would have accomplished it, too, if he had not run up against you, Kane."

"Say, rather, against you, Nick."



"Oh! well, it is the same thing. We were fortunate in cutting short his piratical career, and he is now paying the penalty for his misdeeds. Now, Kane, I am satisfied that this brother, the real count, is a better man than the one we captured. There is more of the gentility of his family in him. I have never thought that he was entirely a willing party to the pirate business. He was an accessory, of course, because he remained quiescent, and did not betray his brother, but I doubt very much if he ever willingly committed a piratical act, or stole, until he first stole the *Shadow* from her moorings here in the city, and then held you up in mid-ocean."

"Well?"

"Now, we are endeavoring to trace his course across the ocean, are we not?"

"Yes."

"Then we have to consider why he has done the things he has."

"Sure."

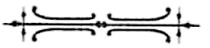
"First, then, it goes without saying that he was in love with Bessie, does it not?"

"I think so."

"You saw it. I saw it. Your wife saw it. We all saw it. Isn't it so?"

"Yes," they all assented.

"Very good. Now, if you will hark back to the capture of his brother, you will see how all of the real count's castles in the air were shattered by that event."



"I see."

"The brother was a married man; he could only retrieve his fortunes in some such manner as he adopted; but with the count, it was different. He was single. He had fallen in love with Bessie. If he could succeed in winning her for his wife, his fortunes would be retrieved on the spot, and after a manner entirely honorable; for Bessie is rich, in her own right, is she not?"

"Yes."

"I think he really loved her. I think that she was attracted to him. I even think that it might have ended by her marrying him. It is certain that he thought so. Then, in an instant, the cup he was holding to his lips was shattered. His hopes were dashed to the ground. He determined to disappear. He did so. Then he began to think out some way of overcoming the difficulty that had arisen; of bridging the chasm that had suddenly been dug at his feet. And, Kane, he saw but one way—only one. There was the yacht where he could possess himself of it. Bessie was in Bermuda. He could steal the *Shadow*. He could hold up the *Goalong* and take Bessie away, bodily. Thus, at least, he would find the opportunity to plead with her—to present his side of the case exactly as it is; and, perhaps, in spite of all, to win her, for he believed she loved him. At the worst, he could not be lower in her opinion than he already was. This afforded him a chance to win, and he took it."

CHAPTER XIX.
PLANNING THE PIRATE'S CAPTURE.

"But all this," said Kane, "does not track the fellow across the briny."

"I am coming to that."

"You figure that he has taken her—or is taking her—to Anjou?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"In the first place, Kane, he must have decided, in his own mind, that this trip of his across the ocean, with Bessie as a passenger on the *Shadow*, is his last and only chance."

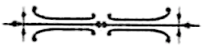
"I should say so."

"And at the end of that voyage lies his fate."

"Humph! Well?"

"Before he decided to take the terrible risk of capturing Bessie and carrying her away as his prisoner, he must have made up his mind that all outlawry, save that one act upon which his mind was resolved, must be a thing of the past."

"Perhaps so. Who knows?"



"I think I know. I think I am putting myself in the place of that man. 'Put yourself in his place' is a pretty good maxim, when you wish to get at the real inwardness of an act committed by another."

"I believe that. Go on, please."

"When he got away with the *Shadow* and resolved to capture Bessie, he figuratively took the bit in his teeth."

"I should say he did."

"But you must not forget that he could not place himself in a worse position than that in which he already found himself, so far as his future and his desires were concerned. In short, old man, he has thought it all over with great calmness, and, as calmly, he has selected—Bessie, or death."

"By Jove, Nick!"

"Without her, life has seemed to him not worth the living; and without having first had an opportunity to explain things to her, as they really were, death itself seemed almost impossible. Don't you understand, that if he had gone away somewhere and killed himself quietly, that all her life Bessie would have thought of him—if she thought of him at all—as a despicable scoundrel?"

"Well, she would have been pretty nearly right."

"Granted; but not from his standpoint."

"Well, then——"

"The other side of the picture which he saw was this: He could capture her; he could take her, a captive, aboard the *Shadow*; he could keep her there, a passenger, a guest, and an

unwilling—or, perhaps, a willing—listener to his plea. In either case, she would have heard it. In either case, he would have had an opportunity to explain. In either case, she would be compelled to listen to him, and in either case, she would in the end think not so ill of him as she had thought. He believed that he could prove to her, while she was aboard the pirate cruiser, that he was not all bad; he believed that he could convince her that it was because of true love for her that he had dared to do that thing; he believed that there might be enough romance in her nature to induce her to listen to him under such circumstances, where she would never have done so else; he believed that there was a possibility that she might really love him, and that love would triumph over all obstacles.

"But—and here is the crucial point—he believed that if he failed, that if she refused utterly to listen to him, that is she scorned him, she would at least be led to believe in the purity of his motives, and to think of him after his death as one not so utterly bad as she had pictured him."

"After his death?"

"Why, yes; for if my idea is at all correct, he means to kill himself at the end of the voyage, if he finds that he cannot win her forgiveness and her love. He is a Frenchman, remember; he is romantic; he has staked his entire fortune, and his life, as well, upon this throw, and if he loses, he will shrug his shoulders and put a bullet through his brains as calmly as he stood upon the deck of the *Shadow* and told you that if you resisted him, he would shoot."

"And so, you think——"

"I think—nay, I almost know, that he will take Bessie directly to Anjou—to that château of his. I think he will treat

her as an honored guest. I believe that she will suffer no inconvenience, and, least of all do I regard her as in personal danger. And at the end of the cruise of the *Shadow*, I believe that if she so wills it, he will open wide the way for her to go free."

Kane was silent for a long time, as were the others; but at last the millionaire raised his head again and spoke.

"Nick," he said, "there is always a chance that you may be wrong, isn't there?"

"Yes."

"Then let us look at both sides of this question."

"Very well."

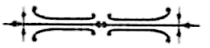
"Suppose that you are all in the wrong?"

"Well?"

"Suppose that your conjectures as to Count Cadillac's ultimate purpose are wrong, and that he has no more idea of taking her to Anjou than you have? We won't depart from the original theme, that you believe he will treat her square—for I agree with you about that silk-purse-and-sow's-ear business—but suppose that his intention is merely to keep her a prisoner where she is, on board the *Shadow*, until such time as she will agree to become his wife; eh?"

"Go ahead, Kane. You have not finished yet."

"No; I haven't. Suppose all that; eh? He can live by following up his piratical profession, and the devil himself can't catch him. If he is pursued too hotly, he can go under water and stay there until the pursuit has drawn off."



"Granted. What more?"

"Well, there isn't any more—at least, there isn't much more. But suppose all that, now, where would you look for him, in such a case?"

"That is quite a different question, Max."

"I know it is; but we have got to answer it. You see, Nick, it goes without saying that we start for Anjou at once. If he is going there with her, he will arrive there before we could possibly do so ourselves, for the *Shadow* is one of the swiftest things I ever saw in the water."

"She is that."

"Well, if he is going there, he will be there already when we arrive. If he is not going there, where will he be?"

"Somewhere at the opposite side of the world, most likely."

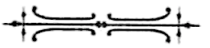
"But where?"

"My dear fellow, I cannot answer that any more than you can."

"Well, that is what we have got to consider—and just as sure as you are sitting there, I don't believe we will find him at his château. No man, I don't care a rap how much of a silk purse he happens to be, is going to give up life, and hope, and everything else, without continuing the struggle as long as there is a possibility of coming out winner."

"That is quite true."

"Well, then, the question comes down to this: If Cadillac does not take Bessie to his château, where shall we look for them? But wait; you need not reply to that now, for you have



not had time to think about it, and you are no more capable of answering it than I am, at the present moment. I will change the question. How shall we look for them?"

"I had thought," replied Nick slowly, "of taking passage on one of the fast ocean liners for the other side, and hastening direct to Anjou; but your last suggestion puts a different face upon it. There is another and a better way."

"Now, we are getting at it. What is the other and the better way? Remember, I don't care a picayune what it costs, even if it goes up into the millions."

"I know that; but I don't think it will approach the millions."

"What is it?"

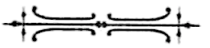
"This: You and I will take the midnight train to Washington. In the morning, early, we will call upon the President. We will explain the situation to him, and unless I am greatly mistaken, he will find a way to place the *Dolphin* at our disposal at once. She is at the Washington navy-yard now. I happen to know that. He will also direct the department of state to cable all over the world to have the *Shadow* intercepted, wherever she may appear."

"Now you're talking."

"In that way we will arrive at Anjou quicker than we could if we traveled by a regular ocean liner, and so had to make part of the journey overland after we arrived in France. We can go directly to his château, doubtless. It will not be hard to find."

"And say, Nick."

"Yes."



"It may be that he will have set Bess at liberty before we get there. We may find that she has gone to Paris or London, and is there awaiting us, after cabling the fact that she is safe and well."

"It is possible."

"Well, I was going to say this: If that should turn out to be the case, what, then?"

"What, then?" replied Nick. "Why, then you may return to New York with Bessie, if you like, but you can leave me behind, for I've got an engagement to keep with Count Cadillac; and, Max, I'm going to keep it, if I have to search over the whole world to find him in order to do it. I've got several questions to ask him, and he's got a few answers to give. He has taken one step too far in this business for Nick Carter ever to let up on him."

"Bully for you, Nick! But, I say! Suppose—eh?—suppose we should find that Bessie has forgiven him, and married him?"

For a moment the detective did not reply; but then, very quietly, he said:

"I think, Max, that we won't try to cross any bridges until we get to them."

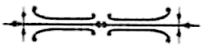
CHAPTER XX.
A WEIRD VOICE OF THE NIGHT.

It is not necessary to give in detail here the record of Nick Carter's trip, accompanied as he was by Maxwell Kane, to Washington; and of his interview with the President very little need be said, save that the detective's prophecy was fully fulfilled.

The *Dolphin* was placed at their disposal at once, and there was no time lost in sailing. Moreover, the state and navy departments were set in motion, and information concerning the pirate was despatched all over the world, so there could be little doubt that he could exist for a long time on the high seas without being captured.

The Château Cadillac was readily found when the detective and his friend arrived in the neighborhood.

It was an extremely old building, founded, no doubt, in the Middle Ages. It bore evidence that time after time it had sunk into ruins, only to be again reclaimed. No doubt it had been stormed and torn almost from its foundations early in its history; but now it looked merely what it was—a historic old pile of graystone, moss-grown and ivy-wreathed, with a huge, square tower at one end of it, which clung to the edge of an abrupt precipice jutting out over the sea, so that it seemed as if it must topple and fall into the rock-bound and turbulent waters.



But it had stood there through many ages, defiant of storm and time alike; and it stood there now, as the two men approached it, grim, uninviting, repellant, gloomy, almost terrible.

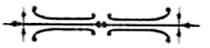
Nor was the approach to it more inviting than its appearance. It was situated at the apex of a neck of land which jutted out into the sea, and thus formed a treacherous-looking harbor on one side of it, while the endless water tossed and fumed, and threw spray hundreds of feet into the air on the other.

From the foundation of the old castle to the water below was a fall of a sheer hundred feet, and if you add to this ninety feet more, which was approximately the height of the tower itself, you will get some idea of its appearance.

Small, oblong windows appeared at intervals along the height of the tower. Their position was irregular, almost as if they were there merely to give light upon winding stairs, which ascended inside. Back of the tower was a huge building, irregular in shape, and representing several periods in the history of the country. Behind all this, the land stretched away, narrowing as it extended inland, until part of it which adjoined the mainland was little more than a causeway.

The *Dolphin* had approached from the sea, early that morning, and the detective, from her deck, had taken a thorough view of the harbor and all the surrounding territory.

No sign whatever of the *Shadow* had been discovered, and after standing on and off awhile, the *Dolphin* had sailed away again, and disappeared from view from the château, if, indeed, she had been seen from there at all.



But, nevertheless, the *Dolphin* had not gone far.

Three miles away a place had been discovered where the detective and his friend could be put ashore, and they had left the despatch-boat—really a vessel of war under that name—and embarked for the balance of their adventure on foot.

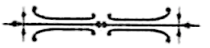
But the *Dolphin* was not to desert them. She was to stand on and off until she was signaled from the shore; and there was a code of signals arranged between her commander and the detective which made it possible for them to communicate in the night, as well as during the day.

As the two approached the causeway together, it was impossible to tell whether the castle was deserted or not. There certainly was no outward sign of life about the building, and already each of them had decided in his own mind that their search here would probably be fruitless.

However, the *Dolphin* had paused long enough before she arrived off the Château Cadillac for Nick to go ashore and communicate with the American ambassador in Paris, and by that means he had discovered that nothing whatever had been heard of Miss Harlan, or of her daring abductor, or, indeed, of the vessel in which she had been stolen away.

"I am afraid we are on the wrong scent, Nick," said Kane, as they crossed the causeway together.

"Wrong or right, we will know one thing or the other for a certainty before we search elsewhere," replied the detective. "I cannot disabuse my mind of the idea that he would bring Bessie here. Cadillac was no fool. He would know that the navies of the world would be after him since his exploit in capturing her. He would realize that you would report the matter at



Washington, and that the cables would be kept hot about him. He could not hope to escape with the *Shadow*. Pirates cannot rove the seas now as they used to do, old man."

"I know that."

"Then you can bank upon it that he has brought Bessie here. You can make up your mind that the *Shadow* is somewhere at the bottom of that little harbor, waiting until Cadillac has further need of her. Remember that he can sink her at will. Remember that those steel masts of hers are nothing more or less than means by which she can be approached and her pumps set to work to raise her after she has been immersed and abandoned for a long time. I do not know, but I have no doubt that he could leave her there for the better part of a year and then raise her again at will."

"And what shall we do now, Nick?"

"Do? Why go to the castle."

"But how are we to get inside?"

"I do not know that—yet."

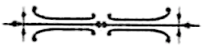
"The thing doesn't look as if we could ever get inside of it, if those who are already there should choose to keep us out."

"Max, I never saw a house in my life which I could not find a way to enter, if I started out to do it."

"Great Scott! You don't call that thing a house, do you?"

"Well, it's a house, all right, so far as my remark goes. I'll find a way to get inside."

"There is one thing in our favor."



"What is that?"

"If there happens to be anybody there, on the watch, they won't be apt to see our approach. These rocks along here shelter us, you know."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that. Better keep out of sight as much as possible."

The time was late in the afternoon. It was now approaching dark, in fact. The day had been a cloudy one, and now a drizzling rain was falling. Taken all in all, the time for their descent upon the castle could not have been a more propitious one.

The two strode on silently, side by side, for some distance, when Kane spoke again.

"Are you going to tackle the front door and demand admittance?" he asked, while he paused a moment for breath.

"Not on your life!" was the reply.

"Eh? What are you going to do?"

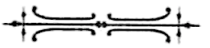
"I'm going to get inside the place secretly, if possible."

"But——"

"Look here, Max. We have got to work on the principle that Bessie is a prisoner inside that old pile of stones, haven't we?"

"Yes."

"Very well. We will start out on the proposition that



that is a fact. Now, if Cadillac is there, he probably considers himself more or less safe, for a time at least. He does not suppose that we would have tracked him here quite so suddenly. You see, he will have argued that we have considered him as having returned to the pirate business for good, and will, therefore, search the seas, and, perhaps, a few islands in the seas, for him."

"Well?"

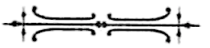
"In the meantime he has come here with the *Shadow*. He has sunk her under water somewhere inside that harbor, where, by the way, she will be a good deal safer than she would on top of it, for it looks like a treacherous spot to me."

"And what then?"

"Why, then he has taken his captive ashore. He has had her conducted to the castle. He has fastened her away in some great room, probably in the tower, given her servants to wait upon her, and, in fact, done everything on earth for her comfort, save the one thing of giving her back her liberty."

"Humph!" said Kane. "I'm not half so sure of that as I pretended to be when we were discussing it in the presence of my wife and her mother."

"Never mind. That is my idea, just the same. And, anyhow, if she is there, and if he is there, you can rest assured that if we went to the door of the place and demanded admittance, it would doubtless be granted us, but, all the same, we would see no sign of the people we are looking for, and we would be told that the count is in America."



"And all the time the count would be nicely hidden somewhere in the old building. Is that what you mean?"

"Yes."

"So you propose to make the search without anybody being put wise to the fact that you are doing it, eh?"

"Exactly. You see, I have started on the proposition that the count will consider himself safe here, at least for a time; on the proposition that he has not yet begun to keep very strict watch along this causeway we have just crossed."

"But he has probably watched the sea, Nick," interrupted Kane.

"I presume so."

"Then he saw the *Dolphin* this morning."

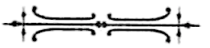
"Well, suppose he did so? There is nothing strange in seeing a vessel approach the coast and sail away again, is there? She showed no flag; and you don't suppose he would know the *Dolphin* by sight, do you?"

"He is a sailor, and a good one. He would know that she was American."

"He might at that. But, even so, he would still be watching the sea for her return, and not paying much attention to the land approach. There, Kane; let us stop here. It will be dark now in a quarter of an hour, and then we can approach without any danger of being discovered."

"Can you find your way, Nick, among all these rocks and pools, and along this slippery cliff, in the dark?"

"Indeed I can. I have taken all my bearings, Max.



And now, there is nothing to prevent us from enjoying a smoke while we wait."

They found a shelter under a shelving rock, where they were protected from the storm, and there they seated themselves, lighted their cigars, and disposed themselves to such comfort as they could find while they awaited the time to advance.

"Under ordinary circumstances, Max," said the detective, "I should prefer to undertake this business to-night alone. I don't suppose you care to be left outside, do you?"

"Not in a thousand years, Nick! No, no! I'm in this thing to a finish. And, besides, it is more than likely that you will run into some sort of a scrap inside that old rookery. If you should, you will need help, and I want to be on hand."

"All right. Now, see if you can refrain from talking for about five minutes, while I do a little thinking. After that it will be time for us to start on."

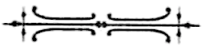
"Midnight would be about the proper time for burglarious enterprises, wouldn't it?"

The detective did not reply, and Kane also lapsed into silence. So the moments passed, until, at last, suddenly the detective rose to his feet, stretched himself, yawned, threw away the stump of his cigar, and said:

"Come on, Max."

"Going?"

"Yes."



"I'm right behind you, old chap, and I'll continue right behind you until the end of the chapter, if anybody should ask you."

The walls of the castle loomed in front of them as they advanced, like the outlines of some great, historic beast. The night was much too dark for them to see anything distinctly, but their eyes had not been blinded by exposure to light of any kind, and so, in effect, they were enabled to see quite clearly as they advanced.

Once the detective paused and seemed for a moment to hesitate.

"I only wish," he said presently, "that it were possible for us to make a circuit of the old pile."

"Why?" asked Kane.

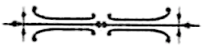
"There must be a light in one or more of the windows, somewhere. Say, Max, I think I can get around the thing if I try. Will you wait here for me if I promise faithfully to return to this spot after you before I attempt to enter the building?"

"What are you going to try to do? Go around it, looking for lights?"

"Yes."

"Then what is the matter with me going one way while you go the other? We would meet at the other side, you know."

"All right. You go that way," and Nick pointed with his finger in the direction he wished Kane to take. "Do you remember," he added, "the long, low, galleylike building we noticed from the deck of the *Dolphin*? The one which stretches



out like a two-story stone bowling-alley, from that wing of the castle to the edge of the cliff?"

"Yes."

"I hardly think you will be able to get past that. Wait for me there."

"Well, if I can't get past it, you can't. How are we going to get together?"

"Leave that to me. Will you wait for me there?"

"Yes."

"Then skip along. If you discover a window with a light in it, make a mark on your memory so that you can locate it later."

"Sure."

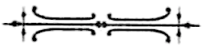
"Keep a sharp eye out for everything that might be important."

"I'll do that; but suppose I run against a man, or a dog, or anything of that kind; eh?"

"You will have to decide what to do when the emergency arises. I would much rather you would not kill anybody, or be obliged, even, to shoot your gun; but all the same, don't take any chances. So long. I'll meet you where I said."

The route which the detective selected for himself was, of course, the one which he regarded as the most dangerous one.

He had, during the day, both from the deck of the *Dolphin* and also from the land, later, studied the outward appearance of the castle with great care.



From the sea it had seemed to him that it was impossible to skirt the base of the tower without falling from the cliff into the sea; but from the land side, as they approached the building, before they reached the causeway, he had decided differently.

Nevertheless, he knew that a path around there would be narrow and dangerous, and he preferred to take the risk himself rather than have Kane attempt it. As he made his way forward now, he steadily approached nearer and nearer to the walls of the huge building—that is, the main building; that part of it which extended backward away from the tower and along the neck of land.

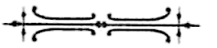
The walls rose beside him, grim, silent, forbidding.

He hurried along close to them, and on his left he could hear the roar of the sea, where it dashed against the rocks a hundred feet below him. The edge of that precipice, he knew, was not more than ten feet from him, and the darkness had now become so intense under the walls of the castle that he could barely discern the ground on which he trod.

Suddenly he came to an abrupt stop, face to face with a second wall, which seemed for a moment to bar his further progress; but he quickly discovered that it was merely a buttress of the castle, and he speedily made his way around it, although in doing so he was compelled to approach so near to the edge of the cliff that the slightest misstep would have precipitated him into the abyss below.

Then on again, however, without accident.

At last, after he had passed two more such buttresses, and each with more danger of falling than the last, he arrived at the tower.



There he paused a moment; and then, as he was on the point of starting forward again, he was suddenly held spellbound in his tracks by the sound of a voice which seemed to be calling to him from among the clouds; and he was amazed and almost unbelieving when he recognized in the words that were uttered his own name.

"Nick Carter! Nick Carter!"

Twice he heard it, and then all was silent again, save for the pounding of the waves against the rocks below.

CHAPTER XXI.
THE MEN INSIDE THE CASTLE.

There was something so weird and so unreal in the sound of his own name, coming to the detective as it did, seemingly from the infinity above him, that for a moment he quite refused to believe that his ears had not deceived him.

Remember, there was the thundering of the waves against the rocks all around him; the boom of the surf as it broke beneath its own weight and violence farther out toward the sea; the sobbing and moaning of the wind over the bleak cliff and through the ruins of the older part of the castle, and the faint cries of sea-birds coming to him from far away to windward. All this tended to render him uncertain about the voice which seemed to call to him from the black sky over his head; just as all this made it impossible to determine whether the voice, if it were indeed a voice, had proceeded from a man or a woman.

But sober second thought reassured him.

Who, but one person in all the world, could have called to him there?

He knew that it was impossible, even if Bessie Harlan were indeed a prisoner inside the old château, that she should have

witnessed his approach, or that she should have recognized him from her aerie window, even if she had discovered the approach of two pedestrians before the gathering darkness had hidden them from view. But he explained the seemingly inexplicable phenomenon in quite another way than that.

"If Bessie is a prisoner there," he reasoned to himself, "she believes absolutely that Max and I will come to her rescue, sooner or later. If she is a prisoner there, she is confined in a room which overlooks the sea—a room in this very tower, in fact; and if all that be true, that call of hers was simply a wail of impatient waiting and longing, called out by her to the heavens, the clouds, the sea, the wide, wide world. Not in the hope that it would literally be heard, perhaps, but, nevertheless, a call to us to hasten."

Several moments he waited, wondering if there would be a repetition of the call; and then, when one came, he wondered again if he should reply to it. His better judgment told him not to do so, and so presently he turned away to pursue his course around the castle.

But he discovered, presently, that he had been deceived in his surmises that it would be possible for him to skirt the tower between it and the water, and, at last, satisfied that he could not do so, he turned back again over the course he had come.

He was not long in arriving at the spot where he had left Kane, but he did not pause there. After hesitating just one instant in order to get his bearings properly, he started forward again toward the place where they had agreed to meet.

When he arrived there, however, Maxwell Kane was not there, and the detective could discover no trace of him in any direction. He waited a few moments, thinking that something

might have detained him, and that he had, therefore, not yet arrived, although he knew all the time that nothing of an ordinary nature could have done so.

There were no impediments in the way between the spot where they had parted and where they agreed to meet.

Nick had just traversed every inch of it, and he had met with no obstacle of any kind, nor had he seen a sign of life or a light anywhere.

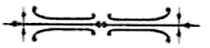
For that very reason he figured that doubtless something had attracted the attention of Kane after his arrival at the place of meeting, and he had gone to investigate. But after he had waited fully half an hour, the detective decided that it was time for him to move.

He had not a doubt now that something had happened to his companion. He was confident, however, that Kane could not have fallen, or have met with an accident, without the intervention of another person.

Presently he scribbled these five words: "Wait here till I return," on a leaf torn from his book of memoranda, and, wrapping it in a handkerchief, he weighted it with a pebble and left it where the white of the cambric would attract the attention of Kane, should he regain the spot before the detective could get back again.

"And now to break my way into that castle," he mused. "And I must take extra care, too, for if some prowlers around this old pile have captured Kane, they will be on the lookout for me as well."

The low building, which resembled a bowling-alley more than anything else, and which extended from one wing of the



castle to the edge of the bluff on the side toward the harbor, had evidently been erected originally to serve as a passageway between the château and the water when the weather was inclement; and this was the building which was before him now. But in inspecting it from a distance the detective had decided that this would provide a means of entrance. It was almost windowless, and such as it contained were much too small and too high from the ground to serve his purposes.

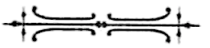
He therefore turned again toward the castle, and hurried toward a spot where he remembered to have seen a wealth of ivy growing against the old walls. He had not forgotten their locality, and he went directly to the spot.

The ivy was old and tough, and had grown firmly in its place, so that when he placed his hands upon it he knew that it would sustain him readily. He recalled the fact that the ivy trailed across several windows, and so he began at once to make his way up it.

The dampness of the falling rain had rendered the ivy in such a condition that it gave out no sound as he climbed, while the dark background against which he clung afforded no opportunity for prying eyes to discover him.

He climbed rapidly, for he realized now that haste was necessary. The strange call to him from the window of the tower, and the disappearance of Maxwell Kane, had convinced him that all was not to be as smooth sailing as he had anticipated.

Soon he arrived at a window, set deeply into the wall, and casemented for defense in time of attack. But this window had long been in disuse, and even the glass had been replaced by heavy planking, to keep out the wind and weather.



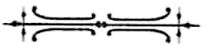
There were two more stories above that one, he remembered, and he continued on, after a pause of only a moment. The second window at which he arrived was in the same condition as the first, so in clambering on, he worked to the right as well as upward, until he arrived at the top story of the old building. Here the third window offered the same impediments as had the others, so he continued on in a straight line toward the front of the castle.

Suddenly, however, he stopped. Directly in front of him, not three feet distant, a light had suddenly shot through the darkness, coming, as he quickly discovered, from one of the windows.

These were set so far back into the wall that it is doubtful if the sunlight could ever, even under the most auspicious conditions, penetrate to the interior of the room; and it was almost as difficult for a light from the interior to filter to the outside. Two steps more upon the vine which held him suspended in mid-air brought him to the window, so that he could see what was passing inside the room, and he peered cautiously around the casement.

He was rather surprised, then, to discover that he was looking into what had once been a part of a suite of rooms, set aside, doubtless, for royalty, or for especially honored guests at the castle. The room itself was very large, and had once been magnificently appointed, but now its furnishings were tawdry and soiled, yellowed with age, and musty from disuse.

Nevertheless, there were many persons within the room. Nick counted six men there. Four of them were seated at a table engaged in a game of cards, and the other two were standing near, observing the game.



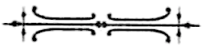
They were so engrossed in their occupation that it did not occur to one of them to look toward the window. But the detective did not linger there to watch them. Instead, he lowered himself sufficiently so that he could pass unobserved beneath the window, and then continued on his way, taking careful note of the location of the room in the meantime.

He had noted, too, that he would have to pass two more windows before he arrived at one which did not open directly into that room, and so he did not pause again in his advance until he reached the third. Here, also, as he raised himself, he discovered that there was a light; but as he peered into the room through the narrow window he was assured that, for the moment, at least, it was unoccupied.

The window, too, was slightly ajar; that is, it was open perhaps half an inch, doubtless for the sake of ventilation. He stepped into the embrasure, which was very deep, and slowly pushed the window open in front of him. A second and more comprehensive glance rendered him positive that nobody was in the room, and with another slightly harder pressure, he opened the casement wide, and stepped inside, closing it, as he had found it, after him.

The room was quite large—possibly twenty-five feet square; and it was used as a sleeping-room; but he had no time to take in further details of the place, for at that instant he heard steps approaching through a corridor, and he had barely time to leap behind the door when it was opened from the outside.

Nick had in that instant prepared himself to leap upon the person who approached, whoever it was, and conquer him, preparatory to continuing his investigations through the castle;



but fate kindly stepped in and served him a good turn at this juncture.

The opening of the door, together with the already open window, created a draft which the flame of the lamp, burning on the table, could not withstand. As the door swung open, the lamp flared, sputtered for an instant, and then went out, leaving the room in total darkness.

Nick could not even discover the outlines of the person who had entered the room, but a round, French oath, in a masculine voice, cursing at the ill luck, left him in no doubt that it was a man.

The extinguishing of the lamp, however, afforded Nick an excellent opportunity to act, and as the man stepped forward toward the table, in order to strike another light, the detective slipped quietly and quickly past him into the corridor. The man had left the door ajar when he stepped forward toward the table, but Nick had the presence of mind to close it, and to close it with a bang, exactly as if the draft had caught it and slammed it shut.

Then he waited a moment and listened, to discover if his deception had been successful; but there was no further sound from the interior of the room, and the detective concluded that the man had relighted his lamp and disposed himself to reading or some other employment, with no thought that he had passed so near to the person of an intruder.

And just at this point Nick made another discovery which was interesting: there was an inside and outside door to each of the rooms on that corridor. That is, there was one for general use—the one which he had already made use of—and another

which opened outward into the corridor, doubtless for use in emergencies.

This door was much heavier than the outside one. They were relics of old days when the castle was likely to be stormed, and the occupants might be compelled to fight from room to room, holding one after another until they were finally driven from all.

Whatever the original uses were, the present one was manifest. The detective lost no time in closing that outside door, and he was agreeably surprised to discover that it was provided with a huge key, which he had no difficulty in removing and replacing on the outside. In another instant he had locked it.

That done, he passed along the corridor toward the doors of the room wherein he had seen the six men; and he had no difficulty in locating it, for he had counted carefully from the outside.

And these doors—there were two of them, he closed and locked in the same manner as he had served the others, so that presently he was satisfied that whatever adventures he might encounter inside the old château these seven men whom he had seen would take no part in them.

"And now for the tower," he said, aloud, as he turned away.

CHAPTER XXII.
A COMBAT WITH THE RAPIERS.

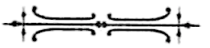
But it was fated that Nick Carter was not to proceed at once to the tower of the castle.

The distance from where he turned again toward the front of the building, to that part of it which might properly be called the tower, was some hundreds of feet, and he had gone not more than half the distance when, just as he was passing a door, it was opened suddenly and a man stepped out upon the corridor, confronting him.

It would be difficult to determine which of the two was the more greatly surprised by the encounter, but it was certainly the detective who recovered from it first.

The man who confronted him paused in amazement. Then, when he perceived Nick was a stranger, he opened his mouth to cry out something. But on that instant Nick leaped forward. As he did so, the man started backward, with the cry still unuttered.

His step backward avoided the blow he would have received, but not all the consequences of it, for the detective, perceiving in time that his hand would fall short of reaching the fellow, altered his intention and turned his onslaught into a rush, so that his two hands fell upon the man's chest, and he



was thrown backward into the room where the detective followed him with a bound.

He closed the door almost with the same motion with which he had passed through it, and then, with his back against it, calmly drew his revolver while the man was rising from the floor, where he had fallen.

"Who the devil are you?" demanded the man, in French. "*Sacre, mon ami*, but that is an odd way you have of making your presence known. And why, monsieur, do you make use of the revolver?"

"Merely to convince you of the wisdom of preserving silence," replied Nick, smiling grimly.

"Silence?" The Frenchman chuckled audibly. "My dear sir, one might yell his lungs loose here, and not be heard inside an adjoining room. These walls were made to withstand sieges. And, besides, if I may venture to inquire, wherefore should I offer to cry out? Eh?"

The Frenchman had stepped back, and Nick saw that he was evidently a character; and he realized, moreover, that the man had not the least idea that he himself was an intruder in the castle. Then, as if to confirm him in that opinion, the man added:

"Ha! I understand. I comprehend monsieur's tendencies—his wish. It is to fight; no?"

The detective could not avoid a smile, but he made no other reply.

"Ha! I have guessed it," continued the Frenchman, rubbing his hands together ecstatically. "It is to fight with me that

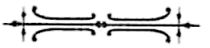
monsieur comes here at this hour. Monsieur is a guest of Count Jean. Perhaps monsieur came to the château on board the yacht with the count. Is it not so? Yes? And the count has told monsieur about Antoine Lafetre. No? It is so; no? Yes? And monsieur has not the belief that Antoine is the greatest fencing-master of the age. Ha! Monsieur has come to witness a proof of it, perhaps. Believe me, monsieur shall be gratified. Monsieur shall be convinced. Yes!"

Nick Carter permitted him to run on without interruption, for the fellow's prattle told him at once many things he desired to know, the most important of which was the fact that Count Jean de Cadillac had in reality arrived at the château in the *Shadow* and was now inside the castle.

It told him, also, that here before him was a conceited Frenchman, by profession a fencing-master, who considered himself the "greatest that ever was." A person who had not an idea beyond the horizon of his own egotism; but, above all, a person who, if Nick could win his confidence, would impart all the information he possessed.

And so, without hesitation, he at once assumed the part for which the French fencing-master cast him. He shrugged his own shoulders in true French fashion, and having returned the revolver to the side pocket of his coat, he raised his eyes, turned out the palms of his hands and replied:

"Yes. I have heard that you, Monsieur Antoine, have some idea of fence, but—parbleu!—it is nothing to what I can do. Monsieur Antoine has not the requisite strength of the wrist; not the quickness of the eye; not the nimbleness of the feet upon the floor; not the touch, the curve, the twist, the reach with the arm; not the——"



"So? Is it so? Does the monsieur believe what he says to be true? Ha! It is a relish that you have brought to me, monsieur. I will instruct you in the fence; no?

Yes! You shall see. Will the monsieur be kind enough to step this way?"

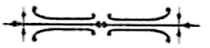
This room, like the other which Nick had seen, was large. It was evidently the home of the fencing-master, for the walls were covered with foils, swords, rapiers, broadswords, battle-axes, staves, dueling-pistols, masks, gauntlets, chest-shields, shoulder-pads—in short, everything was there which belonged to the arts of offense and defense with the blade.

At one end of the room was a raised section, which extended, perhaps, an inch above the surface of the floor, and this was filled with fine, white sand; and it was toward this spot that the Frenchman conducted the detective.

"Look," said the fencing-master, pointing toward some hooks against the wall. "If monsieur will divest himself of his coat; so. Ah! It is a pleasure, a relish that monsieur has brought to me. I will produce my most superb foils——"

"Foils!" exclaimed Nick, with some outward show of contempt. "Rapiers, if you please. The foils are for children."

"Ha! It is magnificent! It is glorious! But we fence, then, not for death? No? For the little touch of the master; is it not so? Yes? For the little twinge at the lobe of the ear; for the prick like a pin-point at the nipple of the breast. Ha! Grand! Magnificent! Monsieur has the true idea. Foils are for children. The fence shall not be seriously to wound the opponent, then? No?



No! It shall be to draw the spot of blood, like the glow of a ruby, one, two, three times? Yes! Three times in succession. Ha! If you do that, you shall be the victor. *En garde, monsieur!*"

While the Frenchman was talking he was also preparing himself for the combat, and every nerve in his lithe body seemed to be alive with joy at the prospect. Egotism is the first requisite for a fencing-master.

Nick Carter excelled in the art of fence, as he did in all other exercises of self-defense. In his youth his father had neglected none of these requirements in preparing the son for his career, and he was as perfect in the use of the foil, the rapier, the broadsword, the staves, and all weapons of the kind as he was with rifle or revolver. Then, add to the perfection of science the wonderful strength which reposed in his muscles, and any fencer will tell you that nothing on earth should be able to defeat him.

And so the two faced each other, smiling; Nick calm, confident, reposeful; the Frenchman alert, eager, and thrilling with pleasure. It is no child's play to fence with needle-pointed rapiers without delivering or receiving a serious wound, and only the most expert of fencers would dare to undertake it.

Like all fencers, when they begin a combat, these two felt of one another's strength of wrist, celerity of action, keenness of guard and thrust, and foot movement; and after a few parries the Frenchman leaped back out of reach for a moment, while he lowered the point of his weapon and exclaimed:

"La, la! But it is magnificent. Grande! Glorious! Monsieur is a foeman worthy to meet the best. He has the strength of wrist

—ah! And the foot movement—yes! But I will show him that he has met one who is greater than he. *En garde, monsieur!*"

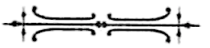
Both had done the "feeling," and they now went at the combat seriously; and Nick, feeling that the time was, perhaps, short, if he was to accomplish all he wished to do that night, determined to win out as soon as possible.

He therefore attacked the Frenchman like a cyclone. He seemed to cover himself with steel; his weapon glinted like a thousand gems through the air, darting in and out like flashes of lightning, forming a perfect shield around his head and breast, and, at the same time, dancing through the guard of his opponent with every thrust he made. And yet, for a long time he got no nearer to the master than that. The Frenchman was really superb in the practise of his art. He was a master of it; but he was not a master of the man who stood in front of him like a granite pillar, suddenly infused with the animation of a spirit and the strength of a Hercules.

After a few moments of this furious attack, Nick saw that his opponent was giving ground. He realized that the pace was telling upon him, and that his own superior strength was overpowering his adversary.

The Frenchman was rapidly tiring. Once he leaped back to avoid a thrust, and would have called for a rest had not Nick laughingly guyed him by asking calmly if he were tired.

Lafetre was tired; but he would sooner have died then and there than to have confessed it, and he returned to the game with redoubled energy. But although the will was there, the steam to keep it going was not. His wrist was tired. The strength of Nick's arm had strained it more than he would have



believed possible before "monsieur" entered the room so strangely.

Then, suddenly, the detective discovered his opportunity. He stepped forward quickly, almost inside the Frenchman's guard; and then— —

Thrust, thrust—parry—thrust.

His weapon darted out like the tongue of a toad in three quick flashes of light. The first of these touched and half-pierced the Frenchman's right ear; the second performed the same service for the left one; the third pinked him on the breast, so that a little spot of blood, not larger than a pea, appeared suddenly upon the surface of the hitherto spotless linen.

And then, before the Frenchman had time to utter a word, the detective turned his rapier in a circle, caught the other under the hand-guard and tore it from the fencing-master's hand, so that in another instant it fell clattering at the opposite side of the room.

For a moment Lafetre seemed utterly dazed by what had happened; and then, with a cry, he leaped forward, fell upon his knees at Nick's feet, and, seizing his hands in his own, kissed them rapturously.

"Magnificent!" he cried. "Never have I seen such fence! Ah, monsieur, I am your slave henceforth. You have the wrist of steel, the quickness of lightning, the eye of omnipotence. It is my first defeat, monsieur, but it is a victory even to have had the honor to fence with one so great. Command me. I am your servant. Your slave, from this hour."

CHAPTER XXIII.
THE SUMMONS AT THE DOOR.

The Frenchman meant what he said, too. There could be no doubt of that. Sincerity, as well as rapture and admiration, were depicted on his face as he knelt there before the detective, kissing his hands.

For a moment Nick regarded him intently, and then he said:

"Rise, Monsieur Lafetre, for, be assured, you are the best fencer with whom I have ever contended."

"Ah! Is it so? Is it true, what you say to me, monsieur?"

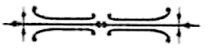
"Yes; it is quite true."

"Then I am content; yes, I am content. It is an honor but to have fenced with such as you are; but to be told that I am the greatest with whom you have ever contended—ah! that is the rapture, indeed. And you, monsieur? I have not yet the honor of hearing your name."

"Nor has any other person within the château," replied Nick.

"Ha! Say you so? Then you came here by stealth? Eh? Is it true?"

"Yes; it is quite true."



"To meet me? To meet Antoine Lafetre? To fence?"

"It seems that I did come here to meet you, and to fence with you," replied Nick slowly. "But there was also another purpose in my coming."

"Ah, monsieur! I think—perhaps—that I comprehend."

Lafetre had regained his feet by this time, and both were rapidly resuming their outer clothing. To this last remark Nick did not reply. He waited to see what the Frenchman would have to say next.

"It is the madame; no? The lady who came over the sea with Monsieur Jean? Yes?"

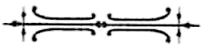
Nick nodded an affirmative.

"Monsieur is—perhaps—a relative? No? A brother, a—can it be that monsieur is the husband of madame?"

"No," said Nick. "I am none of those; but I am her defender. I have come here to rescue her. To take her away. To restore her to her friends."

"And I am gladdened. I am content. It is as it should be. I, myself—I, Antoine Lafetre, should have constituted myself her defender as soon as possible. Only to-day—this afternoon—the madame took me into her confidence. She told me of the friends who love her, who are on the other side of the water—in America, where I should so much like to go."

"Would you, indeed?" asked Nick. "Then give me a helping hand in this matter, and you shall return with me. And I think I can promise you that your art will bring you in a big revenue over there, from those whom you will teach to fence."



"I thank you, monsieur. Perhaps, after I have performed the service which monsieur asks of me, I shall have the honor to accept monsieur's offer. But now—see!"

Lafetre thrust one hand into the pocket of his coat and drew forth two letters, which he gave into Nick's hands; and to the detective's surprise he saw that one of them was addressed to himself, and the other to Maxwell Kane.

The latter he returned into the Frenchman's hands; then, holding the other before his eyes, he said:

"This one is for me, monsieur."

"Ah! Then you are the Nicholas Carter—no?—who is Mademoiselle Harlan's affianced. Is it not so? No? She did not tell me so, but I gathered that much from what she has told me. Mademoiselle is beautiful, monsieur."

"Is she well? Is she safe? Has she been injured in any way? Is she suffering?" asked the detective rapidly.

"Mademoiselle is well, though greatly troubled," replied Lafetre gravely. "She is also safe, since I, Antoine, am here to lay down my life in her defense at any moment. She has not been injured, save in her pride, and she does not suffer only because of the separation from her friends."

"Thank you, Lafetre. She indeed found a friend when she discovered you. Now, where is she at the present moment?"

"She is in the great tower, monsieur."

"And can you take me there?"

"Not now, but later? Yes. I was there but now. It was then that she gave me the letters to send. I told her that I did not

know how soon they might be despatched. Ah! monsieur, I little thought—I, Antoine—that I should have the felicity of delivering one of the letters by hand, and so soon, and to the greatest of all fencers in the world."

"Is she alone in the tower-room, Antoine?"

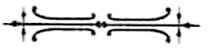
"Ah! Monsieur does me even a greater honor. He admits me to his friendship by making use of one of my baptismal names in addressing himself to me. No; she is not alone. Monsieur Jean de Cadillac is with her; but later? Yes. She will be alone. He will not remain. He has gone to plead his hopeless cause again."

"And who besides the count is there with her?"

"There is no one, monsieur."

"Then, come. We will go there at once. You will lead the way. I have something to say to him as well."

"But monsieur is mad to think of such a thing. There are a hundred armed men in this castle, all ready to do the bidding of the count at a mere gesture of his hand. Perhaps the Monsieur Cartier does not know, but they are smugglers. This is their headquarters. It is to this place where they bring the spoils of their trade. And it is I who am also a prisoner here as well as mademoiselle. I discovered the smugglers' secrets, unwisely. I have been detained a prisoner two years. I have the freedom of the château—yes—but beyond it? La, la! If I should attempt that, a bullet would stop me. But there is one among the smugglers—yes—who is my friend. It was through him whereby I hoped to mail the letters, although I greatly fear they might not have gone. But monsieur is mad to think of going to



the tower while the count is there. There are a hundred armed men in the château, and he has but to signal to them."

"I don't care if there are a thousand," said Nick. "Take me there."

"If monsieur insists——"

"I do insist."

"*Eh, bien*. It is done. But first, monsieur, my rapier; and a pistol or two. If it is to fight—and it will be so—it is well to be prepared."

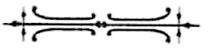
Lafetre was as cool now and as determined as the detective himself. He had no fear; that was evident. He only needed a leader.

Nick watched him while he coolly provided himself with such weapons as he needed—the rapier, with which he had contended against the detective, a pair of revolvers, and a short sword which he buckled on the side opposite the rapier.

"It is well to be provided," he said nonchalantly. "The rapier is a long weapon with which to fight ruffians, such as these men are. Sometimes a bludgeon will knock it from your hand when nothing else would do so; and then, you see, I have this to fall back upon. No? Come, monsieur. I am ready."

He led the way from the room then, closing the door after him. In the corridor it was dark, but the Frenchman seemed to know the way perfectly well, and he started forward without hesitation, although greatly to Nick's surprise, in the direction opposite that in which the tower was located.

Nick stopped him.



"The tower is not in that direction," he said, whispering in his ear.

"No, monsieur; but our way to it lies in this direction. We turn down a corridor to the right, and then again toward the tower. Then we shall arrive at the place we want."

"Good!" said Nick. "Go ahead."

As they were passing the doors which Nick had fastened on the outside he called Lafetre's attention to them, touching the button of his pocket electric light in order to do so.

Lafetre nodded and smiled.

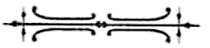
"They cannot get out," he said, "unless they climb down by way of the vines; and so it was, I have no doubt, that you entered; no? In this room are the officers of the two vessels which do the smuggling. In that room yonder should be the captain of one of them. The other captain is ill. He is in England, where it is said he will die. He was wounded by a coast guard."

"And the men—where are they?" asked Nick.

"They are below, monsieur; two floors. On what you would call the ground floor. Ah! that magic light of yours, monsieur. It is fine; but we do not require it now."

They went on again, silently and swiftly. They turned through the corridor to the right as Lafetre had indicated, and then again toward the tower. Presently they arrived at the foot of a flight of winding, stone stairs, which led upward through the darkness, toward the summit of the tower. Here Nick touched the button of his light again and glanced at his watch.

"It is nine o'clock, Antoine," he said.



"Yes, monsieur. At ten the count would retire, if we did not disturb him."

"And the men? What do they do with themselves?"

"Ah! They smoke, and gamble, and drink themselves into a stupor. By midnight they would be, for the most part, helpless."

"Then why have you not sought such an opportunity to escape from the château?"

"There are always guards, monsieur. They are always on the watch. Once, when one of them slept at his post, Monsieur Jean discovered him, and shot him dead."

"Indeed!" muttered the detective. "There is something of the sow's ear about him, after all."

"What was monsieur pleased to remark?"

"Lead on, Antoine. Let us lose no time."

They went on in silence after that, winding up the stairs until it seemed to Nick that they should long ago have arrived at the summit of the tower. But at last Antoine paused before a door of solid oak, and, pointing at it, he said:

"Mademoiselle is there, monsieur. Monsieur Jean is with her. I think if you knock, he will open: and there is no other way of gaining admittance, for the door is solid. But if he will open—ah! Then we will enter before he has the opportunity to close it again. Is it not so? No? Yes!"

Nick Carter raised his hand and rapped loudly against the door.

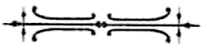
CHAPTER XXIV.
THE DUEL IN THE TOWER.

The detective stood closely against the door when he rapped upon it, and the moment it started to swing open in response to the summons he applied his strength against it so that it was flung inward with a force which nearly upset Count Jean de Cadillac, who appeared on the other side. And with the same gesture Nick forced himself across the threshold, followed instantly, of course, by Antoine Lafetre, who sought to close it again as quickly as possible.

But quick as he was, he was not soon enough to prevent the count from giving the signal of alarm, which Lafetre well knew would be heard by one or more of the guards, and which in a short time would bring a horde of men thundering at the door in their chief's defense.

In that first pressure against the door when he partly opened it, Cadillac had recognized the presence of an enemy; it is doubtful if he did not at that instant also recognize Nick Carter; and even while he staggered back from the force of the blow which the weight of the door delivered against him, he placed a silver whistle to his lips and blew upon it.

But that was all. The door was closed and locked on the inside by Antoine, who withdrew the key, and then stood with his back against it, awaiting orders; and he was as entirely calm as the detective himself.



As Nick stepped into the center of the room and turned to confront the count, Bessie Harlan sprang, with a glad cry, from the embrasure of one of the windows, and almost threw herself into his arms. But she recoiled before she quite reached him, and shrank backward again with her hands to her eyes, for Cadillac had drawn a revolver from his pocket and was in the very act of aiming it at Nick Carter's heart.

He was prevented from firing, however, for a gleam of steel shot through the air, and a light, quick blow descended upon the count's wrist, knocking the weapon from his grasp to the floor, and Antoine said quietly:

"If monsieur le comte attempts to recover his weapon, I will spit him upon this rapier."

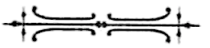
Nick Carter laughed aloud. Then he turned to Bessie, who had now recovered somewhat; but she stood staring at him as if she could hardly believe her senses.

"I knew you would come to my rescue," she said at last. "Thank God you are here!"

"Yes; I am here, Miss Harlan; very much here, as this double-dyed scoundrel shall soon discover," replied Nick.

But the count had now also recovered some of his accustomed coolness. He had retreated to the opposite side of the room, so that he had placed a table between himself and the detective; and Nick turned again toward Bessie.

"Return to the window for a moment while I deal with this fellow," said Nick to her; but Antoine stepped forward hastily.



"Ah! monsieur," he said, "I have the key of the door in my possession, so that he cannot get out; and the men who are coming this way—neither can they enter. Then, afterward, there is another way out which the count does not suspect I know about, but which I will show to you. It is true that it leads through a part of the château, and that we will doubtless be obliged to fight, but it will not be like fighting a hundred men on the narrow stairway we have just ascended. And now, monsieur, I have a favor to ask of you."

"A favor, Antoine? What is it?"

"Permit me to fight with the count with the rapiers. See; I will give him mine—so!" and he tossed his own gleaming weapon upon the table in front of the count. "And now, you will let me have the use of yours? Is it not so? Yes! Ah, it would be child's play for you to kill him—you, who have defeated me—Antoine Lafetre—as if I were a babe. It would not be an equal combat. Shall it be so? Yes. I thank you."

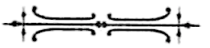
"Go ahead, Antoine—if he will fight you. The mademoiselle and I will act as witnesses."

Antoine turned, with Nick's rapier in his grasp, and approached the table behind which the count still lingered.

"You are a dog," he said quite calmly. "See! I treat you so!"

He withdrew a glove from his pocket, and after wadding it in his hand, threw it deliberately into the count's face.

"It shall be fair play, count," said Nick, "if you have the courage and the skill to fight with Antoine."



But he need not have said it. At the blow of the glove, and because of a little, nervous laugh uttered by Bessie Harlan, the count seized the rapier from the table in front of him and leaped from his barricade into the center of the room.

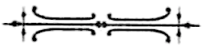
In an instant the two were at it, and the fighting was rapid, furious, deadly.

Nick knew that such a pace could not last, and for a moment he felt a qualm lest Antoine should fall before the fury of the count's attack. But he speedily discovered that there was no need for his misgivings, for the combat was as fatal as it was swift.

One lunge the count gave which seemed impossible for Antoine to parry; nor did he do so. But he stepped quickly backward beyond the reach of the point, and then lunged forward his own weapon, so that he put the point of it, to the guard, straight through his adversary's breast, piercing his heart.

It was all done so quickly, and it was over so suddenly, that neither of the spectators had time to realize it; and the stroke was so deadly that the count sank back upon the floor with only a sigh. He never uttered another sound after that.

Bessie, when she saw him fall, ran quickly toward him and would have knelt beside him had not Nick restrained her. The man was dead; and he died so suddenly that he had not even the time to turn his eyes toward the woman whose every sense of propriety he had outraged, but whom, withal, he had treated kindly and considerately to the end.



And then they were brought to themselves again by Antoine, who was in the act of presenting the borrowed rapier to Nick.

"Permit me," he said, bowing. "I did it with that trick I learned of you, monsieur, but now. And now, monsieur and mademoiselle, if you will but follow me—no? Yes! Listen! The smugglers are already on the stairs. In a moment they will be hammering at the door; but in an hour they will only just have broken it down. It is strong. It is reliable. Below, where it is necessary that we emerge again into the interior of the château, it is possible that we may meet with opposition; but, monsieur, we will not anticipate. No. If you will but have the kindness to come with me now. See!"

He approached the high wainscoting at one side of the room and pressed against an invisible spring—invisible to the others, but plain to him—and a section of the wall opened before them.

"My father was fencing-master to Monsieur Jean's father," he said, simply, in explanation. "I learned the secret from him. *Aprez vous, monsieur, et mademoiselle?* No? Then be so good as to follow me. I will lead the way."

The stairs which they descended were not unlike the others by which they had gained the tower-room, save that they were narrower; and it seemed to Nick that they wound down and down, interminably. At last, however, they came to a halt at the foot of them.

"Beyond is the corridor of the ground floor of the château," said Antoine, pointing at a door in front of them.

"Wait a moment," said Nick, as he was about to open the door. "Antoine, I have a double duty to perform. I did not come

here alone. I was accompanied by a friend—the one to whom the other letter is addressed."

"Max?" asked Bessie.

"Yes. He is here somewhere. He was to meet me at a point outside the castle, and he did not appear. It is possible that he has fallen into the hands of the smugglers, but it is also possible that he is still out there waiting, for I left a message for him if he should return. But if, on the other hand, he has been captured, I must first put you in a place of safety, and then ——"

"Will monsieur permit me?" asked Antoine at this juncture.

"What, Antoine?"

"If monsieur's friend has been taken prisoner, I know where he would be confined. Come! We will look there for him. It is on our way out."

"Antoine, you're a treasure! Lead on. Bessie, have you got that gun yet?"

"Yes; I have never parted with it for a moment, save once."

"Good! Go on, Antoine."

They passed into the corridor. It was silent and deserted, but not dark, for here and there a light gleamed dimly through the massive hall.

Along this and down another flight of steps they passed, and at last stopped before a heavy door, barred with iron on the outside; and this bar Antoine lost no time in removing.

"It is their prison," he said; and threw the door open, but only to be thrown from his feet to the floor by the precipitate

attack of Maxwell Kane, who had been waiting for just such an opportunity.

"Great Scott, Nick!" he exclaimed, when Antoine had been assisted to his feet and a few necessary explanations were made; "I didn't expect to find you here, or I wouldn't have come out so swift. I was pounced on from behind while I was waiting for you, a blanket was chucked over my head, and I was brought here and locked in before you could say Jack Robinson. That must have been a week ago, at least."

"Two hours and a half," corrected Nick.

"Is that all?" Then he gathered Bessie under his arm and led her from the château, following Nick and Antoine.

There was no more fighting.

Their progress out of the château was not impeded in any way, nor did they meet with interference across the causeway.

The place where they had left their conveyance was reached at midnight, and just as the sun was rising in the morning they succeeded in signaling the *Dolphin*.

The United States vessel took them to a convenient harbor and left them there, for passage home via one of the liners; but the war vessel returned to the Château de Cadillac, accompanied by a French gunboat.

Of the resultant fate of the smugglers themselves, there is no record; but of the *Shadow*, it is known that she was raised from the bottom, where she was resting, and ultimately delivered to her owner, who was a Russian prince, for whom she had been built to order.

Bessie Harlan was restored to her friends, and the secret of her mysterious trip abroad was never divulged.

And Monsieur Antoine Lafetre? And his beloved art? He returned to America with Nick Carter and Maxwell Kane, and is now a very successful fencing-master, thanks to Nick's patronage, whom the Frenchman seems to regard as something more than human.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he will exclaim when Nick Carter's name is mentioned. "Monsieur Carter is not a man, as you or me. He is, what you say, a genius. He is a master of the fence, and brave, ah! he is a wonder!"

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